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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

BRAZIL... Corinthians fans celebrate their club winning the Libertadores Cup for the first time in their history

TUNISIA... Club Africain's Hamza Massaadi (left) is challenged by Oumar Konate of Malian club Djoliba in the CAF Confederation Cup

SWITZERLAND...Marco Schonbachler of Zurich holds off a challenge from Lucerne's Philipp Muntwiler as the Swiss season kicks off

COLOMBIA...Santa Fe players rejoice at claiming the Colombian title after they beat Deportivo Pasto at the El Campin stadium in Bogota

SLOVENIA...Olimpija (in green) and Luxembourg club Jeunesse Esch compete in the Europa League first qualifying round

SOUTH SUDAN... supporters try to get a view of South Sudan's friendly against Uganda

USA...Houston Dynamo's Jermaine Taylor cools down during an away game against Sporting Kansas City

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FIFA

For the Game. For the World.

Power, corruption & bribes

World football's governing body FIFA has been thrown into chaos by a series of dramatic events. Keir Radnedge pieces together recent developments

Sepp Blatter, if he were so minded, could take up a line from Mark Twain: "Reports of my demise have been greatly exaggerated."

Blatter is not in danger of losing his presidency of FIFA either over the ISL revelations, or the Bin Hammam "clearance" by CAS, or by whatever new investigator Michael Garcia may uncover. He always has the answer, he is skilled at keeping critics and opponents off-balance, and he is the key controller of the essential reform process.

He did not emerge unscathed from the ISL file release. Critics considered it inconceivable that he had been unaware that, for two decades, Joao Havelange and then Ricardo Teixeira (plus others) had been receiving enormous commissions/bribes from ISL.

Indeed, his claim to have known nothing raises questions about his competence as general-secretary/chief executive. Yet he said: "It was only after the collapse of ISL in 2001, and the criminal investigation, that light was shone into this darkness."

Blatter has always denied receiving illicit payments. He has said he was offered a bribe only once and that was from a federation president during the 1986 World Cup qualifiers. He returned the money.

Indicative of Blatter's staying power is that, although he has said he would not stand for re-election as FIFA president in 2015, no one will believe it until they see it.

Slow reform process...Blatter displays a draft copy of a new FIFA Code of Ethics

CODE OF ETHICS

American lawyer Garcia is FIFA's choice to lead corruption investigation

American Michael Garcia is about to become the busiest man in world football. Busier even than Sepp Blatter, the 24/7 president of FIFA.

This is because Garcia – who is yet another Interpol-linked appointee to the FIFA reform process – has landed the crucially important role of head investigator of the new Ethics Committee.

Significantly, Blatter has stated that Garcia and his team will not be bound by any statute of limitations. This is both intriguing and unproven. When the 2006 Congress created the ethics platform it was on the specific terms that nothing in the past fell within its remit.

That restriction was created so that Jack Warner, then a FIFA vice-president and president of CONCACAF, could escape all allegations about his dubious role in World Cup ticket-selling operations.

Whether Congress will need to formally undo that stricture remains to be seen. As it stands, Blatter says that Garcia has total freedom to delve back into the ISL corruption scandal as well as into the voting among the executive committee for Russia and Qatar as hosts of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups respectively.

He could, as Blatter was perceived to have teased, even look back into allegations about the award to Germany of the 2006 World Cup.

Certainly Garcia will need to go right back to square one on the entire Mohamed Bin Hammam issue and start all over again – along with attacking the ISL case, which may implicate more people than merely Joao Havelange and Ricardo Teixeira.

Blatter came out of his executive meeting to say: "We have decided to bring this [ISL] file to the attention of Mr Garcia, and he will have not only the right but the duty to have this case analysed on ethic and moral matters and then report back to the executive committee."

> Blatter has stated that Garcia and his team will not be bound by any statute of limitations

Garcia landed the investigatory and adjudicatory job on a unanimous vote of the executive committee. Also unanimous was approval of the new Code of Ethics and of Germany's Hans-Joachim Eckert as chair of the judgmental end of the process. Both men own significant independent status.

These appointments, plus the two chambers' members, and the new Code of Ethics are the only solid achievements of the reform process which Blatter launched amid promises of high-speed action on June 1 last year.

WORLD CUP BIDS

Qatar and Russia awards under the spotlight

The awards of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups were mired in such muddied controversy that it is no surprise they continue to be the source of widespread suspicion.

Event bidding is always a fraught and tension-filled process and running two simultaneously was a recipe for disaster although, as Sepp Blatter once said, "it seemed a good idea at the time".

The opportunity to pin down sponsorship and television money so far ahead has proved a profitable business, particularly against the background of the world credit crunch. But the sores created by how votes were gained and lost continue to fester.

New ethics investigator Michael Garcia can look into all of this, though such investigations can only be window dressing. The award contracts have been signed, sealed and exchanged, and both Russia and Qatar are already into the essential high-cost development programmes – not for either of them the procrastinating style of 2014 World Cup host Brazil.

Equally intriguing was the reference Blatter made to the award of the 2006 finals to Germany.

Concerns have long existed over some of the negotiations conducted in the background over television contracts and about the ultimate vote in the FIFA executive. The Oceania president, Charles Dempsey, quit the meeting before the vote which thus tilted by one in favour of Germany against South Africa. Blatter claimed the vote was 10 to nine, in fact it was 12 to 11.

Recalling the vote in an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Blick*, Blatter said: "Maybe I was too relaxed and naive about what happened."

When asked if he thought the 2006 World Cup had been "bought", Blatter replied: "I am not speculating about anything, just making an observation."

That slur infuriated German officials, including 2006 bid leader Franz

Awards...Blatter and Beckenbauer; new stadium building and development programmes have started in Qatar (left) and Russia right)

Beckenbauer, Bundesliga president Reinhard Rauball and Wolfgang Niersbach, the new DFB leader. The latter had already been angered enough by the ISL revelations.

Niersbach said he was "shocked" while Rauball, who is also president of Borussia Dortmund, lined himself up with his Bayern Munich counterpart Uli Hoeness in demanding that Blatter quit as FIFA president.

Rauball, responding to the ISL revelations, said: "As it stands, Blatter should hand over his duties as soon as possible to someone.

"For the sake of credibility of the reform process, FIFA needs someone who is willing to make a fresh start."

At least Rauball did not use the media for his message but telephoned Blatter and told him in person.

Confirmed...Teixeira received millions from ISL

ISL bribes

Havelange and Teixeira confirmed as recipients of multi-million "commissions"

The release of the ISL documents by the Swiss federal court was, in one sense, an anti-climax as they only confirmed what had long been reported: that former FIFA president Joao Havelange and his former son-in-law – and football heir – Ricardo Teixeira had received millions of dollars in commissions/bribes from the one-time FIFA marketing partner.

For almost two decades ISL, founded in 1982 by the late Adidas heir Horst Dassler, was the all-powerful marketing partner of both the world football federation (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The court documents, originally declared sealed and confidential by the Zug cantonal court, were always known to have identified senior sports officials – including CAF president Issa Hayatou, CONMEBOL president Nicolas Leoz and international athletics boss Lamine Diack – as having been on the payroll of the company which was declared bankrupt to the tune of $300million more than a decade ago.

Former president... Havelange in 1990

Teixeira received the present-day equivalent of $13m between 1992 and 1997 while Havelange received a payment of 1.5m Swiss francs in 1997 (then worth around $1m). Payments directly attributed to accounts connected to the two Brazilians totalled almost 22m Swiss francs (now $14m) between 1992 and 2000.

In total around 123m Swiss francs were channelled into accounts whose "ownership" remains unknown or unproven.

Last year the IOC administered slaps on the wrist to its members Hayatou and Diack, but Havelange, the FIFA president between 1974 and 1998, escaped Olympic justice by resigning his own membership shortly before an IOC ethics hearing. Blatter remains an IOC "untouchable" by virtue of his presidency of FIFA.

Havelange and Teixeira – who until earlier this year was president of both the Brazilian football confederation and the country's 2014 World Cup organising authority – had sought for years to prevent release of the ISL file. The closure of that file had been ordered in Zug, where ISL was based, in exchange for a repayment into court of around 5m Swiss francs.

Blatter, general-secretary and then chief executive of FIFA in the ISL era, said that such payments were not illegal under Swiss law at the time. However this was contradicted by the fact that the Swiss prosecutors were preparing a criminal case against both Havelange and Teixeira.

Media pressure through the Swiss legal system for the release of the file was maintained, among others, by the business newspaper *Handelszeitung* and the BBC.

This was endorsed by the governance expert Mark Pieth when he was commissioned last year by FIFA to oversee structural reform.

Three times Swiss courts rejected applications to open the file.

Subsequently FIFA, which had been a party to opposing the release of the ISL file along with the two Brazilians, withdrew from the case. The Swiss Supreme Court reached its final decision on July 3.

> The ISL documents confirmed what had been long reported: that Havelange and Teixeira received millions of dollars

Remarkably, in the Swiss social and legal context, the court ordered that the role of the media in exposing corruption, was a significant positive factor in its decision.

Cleared...former AFC president Bin Hammam

BIN HAMMAM AND CAS

Former AFC president is offered a route back into football by court decision

Mohamed Bin Hammam is back... well, almost.

One year ago the 63-year-old Qatari was suspended for life by FIFA over bribery allegations following the notorious Port of Spain presidential election campaign conference.

His first reaction, after persuading the Court of Arbitration for Sport to overturn the ban, was to declare an intention to quit football now that he considered his name had been cleared.

Sounding tired and worn down, he said: "My wish is to quit and retire. I served football that long, more than 42 years, I have seen a very ugly face of the sport: envy, jealousy. I will not talk about the corruption.

"I have found myself in the last year. I have found Mohamed Bin Hammam, the man of the family, of his friends, of going back to my business. I have found peace in the last year, I wish I can continue like this. For me, peace and enjoyment is outside the football environment.

"I have one mission, one target is to clear my name, then I will say goodbye.

"It is my wish to leave football. I don't find any enjoyment in it. My enjoyment and entertainment now is outside the football environment."

But, as Bin Hammam's lawyers hinted, he may yet have second thoughts because CAS, in effect, handed him a legal justification to reclaim the presidency of the Asian football confederation from its acting

leader, China's Zhang Jilong.

Bin Hammam had an initial appeal against his life ban rejected by FIFA's appeals panel; CAS then ruled against his attempt to prevent the Asian confederation considering the organisation of presidential elections of its own. Just about every appointment made within the Asian, and possibly the central and North American regions, may now be open to challenge.

A further complication was the AFC's decision in mid-July to suspend for 31 days the then already-suspended Bin Hammam over financial irregularities revealed in an audit of AFC accounts by Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Sources close to Bin Hammam considered the timing of the release of the audit as deliberately "unhelpful".

Bin Hammam was said to have received millions of dollars from individuals linked to AFC contracts and to have spent tens of thousands of dollars on items including a honeymoon for his son and dental work, haircuts and cash payments for his family.

> AFC suspended the already suspended Bin Hammam for 31 days

The audit reported that he spent $700,000 of AFC funds on himself and his family, including $100,000 for his wife, $10,000 on a Bulgari watch for himself and nearly $5,000 for his daughter's cosmetic dentistry. Payments were also made to Asian, African and Caribbean soccer officials.

Bin Hammam's United States lawyer described the allegations as "baseless" and as a FIFA tactic to block his return to a position of power in world football.

JACK WARNER

Former CONCACAF boss continues to snipe from the sidelines

Not surprisingly, Jack Warner welcomed Mohamed Bin Hammam's CAS victory over FIFA. To the disgust of political opponents in Trinidad & Tobago, he claimed he had also been vindicated by the verdict.

Warner, formerly a vice-president of FIFA as well as president of regional bodies CONCACAF and the CFU, evaded an ethics committee summons last year by quitting all football administration. He did so while promising a "football tsunami" of revelations about FIFA which have yet to materialise.

Now Minister for National Security in Trinidad, Warner said he felt "relieved" with the CAS verdict. He added: "I waited a little more than a year for this day and now I feel, not only in a sense relieved, but I feel comforted."

Controversial...Warner

Warner acknowledged the support of friends and colleagues, including prime minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for believing in him. He claimed that, had he not quit football to concentrate on his political career, he would also have been found not guilty by CAS.

However he had not been prepared "to go through this charade" because, for one thing, "I could not afford it."

Reviewing his own history within FIFA and relationship with Sepp Blatter, Warner said: "The crime committed in Blatter's eyes was that an opponent [Bin Hammam] was going against him to change the structure of FIFA. That is why I opposed Blatter in the election."

Newcomer...CONCACAF president Webb (far left)

CONCACAF, in the meantime, has moved on. Jeff Webb, from the Cayman Islands, has taken over the presidency and launched a decisive and fast-moving reform programme. Colombian-born Enrique Sanz has arrived from Traffic Sports USA to take the role of general-secretary vacated just before Christmas by whistle-blower Chuck Blazer.

However, the issue remains of what happens to the two dozen Caribbean association delegates who incurred bans over their involvement in the offering of bribes by Bin Hammam. If, as CAS has ruled, Bin Hammam did not offer bribes then they cannot have been guilty of having accepted them, can they? WS

WHAT NEXT?

- Sepp Blatter will ignore all demands for his resignation, point to the supreme authority of Congress and remain in power.

Ignore calls...Blatter

- Michael Garcia's tenacity will be tested to the full; investigative officers within FIFA (and also European federation UEFA) do not have a track record of long service.

Fully tested...Garcia

- Joao Havelange will remain a figure of controversy, appreciated for his achievements, excoriated for his greed.

In exile...Teixeira

- Ricardo Teixeira will remain in exile in Miami, apparently buttressed financially with a consultancy fee from the CBF and still pulling strings in Brazil, from a distance.

- Jack Warner will continue sniping from a distance but probably not risk any trips out beyond Trinidad & Tobago.

Still sniping...Warner

- Mohamed Bin Hammam will consider how or whether to wield his new-found power; theoretically the CAS verdict can be more potentially disruptive to the Asian confederation than to FIFA.

Consideration...Bin Hammam

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10 STORIES YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Problems...FIFA president Sepp Blatter

1. Former FIFA president Joao Havelange and ex-Brazil federation boss Ricardo Teixeira were named in Swiss prosecutor's report as having received bribes from ISL.....page 8
2. Former Asian confederation president has his FIFA ban lifted by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.....page 8
3. Corinthians win the Libertadores Cup.....pages 18 and 32
4. Olympics football tournament kicks off.....
5. Paris Saint-Germain embark on spending spree.....page 15
6. New season in Europe gets underway.....page 45
7. IFAB votes for goal-line technology and additional assistant referees.....page 17
8. New coaches for France, Holland and Russia in the fallout from Euro 2012.....page 26
9. Arsenal de Sarandi win their first league title in Argentina.....page 34
10. Former England captain John Terry found not guilty of racial aggravation.....page 24

FROM THE EDITOR

Sepp Blatter has been running FIFA for more than three decades, first as general-secretary and since 1998 as president. In that time, his grip on the organisation has intensified, along with his addiction to power and the corrupting five-star lifestyle that accompanies it. Blatter remains in power despite, as we report this month, criminal acts being committed within FIFA by his closest allies and confidantes.

This past month, Blatter was named as "P1" the FIFA official with full knowledge of the multimillion-dollar bribes paid to Joao Havelange, Ricardo Teixeira and others by ISL. We only know of the existence of "P1" because the Swiss supreme court ordered the publication of documents which Blatter has spent years fighting to keep secret.

Blatter says that it was not, at the time, a criminal offence under Swiss law to receive bribes. He has stuck to that line despite the Swiss prosecutor's desire to pursue criminal charges of embezzlement against Havelange and Teixeira, alleging they committed criminal breaches of their duties as executives to FIFA. Blatter, as the highest-ranking FIFA employee throughout the time they were stealing from the organisation, has effectively acted as an accomplice to criminal acts of embezzlement. In any other organisation, in any other sphere of life, the person overseeing such widespread corruption would have allowed independent investigators to step in.

> The sensible thing, the logical thing would be for Blatter to step down. Yet this is FIFA; logic must be suspended

The sensible thing, the logical thing, the blindingly obvious course of action would be for Blatter to step down. Yet this is FIFA; logic must be suspended.

There is even talk of Blatter continuing beyond his current term of office, which ends in 2015. In three years time Blatter will be 79, three years younger than Havelange was when he stepped down as FIFA president.

In the past year, Blatter's closest allies have scuttled away from FIFA, humiliated by the exposure of their corruption. The reputations of Havelange, Teixeira, Mohamed Bin Hammam and Jack Warner lie in tatters – exposed for taking and receiving bribes totalling million of pounds. It has all happened while one man has risen imperviously above the scandals. Indeed, this month Blatter will be wined and dined at the London Olympics as a member of the International Olympic Committee.

For more than 30 years, *World Soccer* has followed Blatter's FIFA career in greater detail than any other publication. At times, it has been hard not to admire his ruthlessness and sheer cunning. His ability to re-invent himself – seen most recently with his u-turn on goal-line technology – has been legendary.

Yet the latest scandals have seen FIFA descend to new depths from which even Sepp Blatter may struggle to recover.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

"We'll be saving €150million"

Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi spins like a top following the sale of Thiago Silva and Zlatan Ibrahimovic to Paris Saint-Germain

FRANCE

Ibrahimovic joins PSG revolution

The signing of Zlatan Ibrahimovic from Milan for £15million was only the third-most expensive capture of the summer for Paris Saint-Germain, with Argentina striker Ezequiel Lavezzi costing £20m and Brazilian defender Thiago Silva £32.5m. But Ibra's arrival in the French capital looks like being the real game-changer for the Ligue 1 side.

The media circus that accompanied the 30-year-old Swede throughout the day of his signing – the highlight being a bit of ball juggling from the new boy in front of the Eiffel Tower – proved as much. Ibrahimovic is box office and PSG have become so almost overnight, thanks to their mind-boggling Qatari wealth and naked ambition to become a serious player on the European stage.

Ibrahimovic has signed a three-year contract worth a gigantic £10.8m a season after tax and he was quick to call his new club: "The team of the future, a future I want to be part of. That's why I left Milan to come here."

Sitting alongside PSG director of football Leonardo and president Nasser Al Khelaifi at a press conference to announce his arrival – and speaking in English – he even went as far as to talk about his new outfit as a "dream team", which will only increase the pressure on coach Carlo Ancelotti to start delivering results sooner rather than later.

PSG will be everybody's favourites to win Ligue 1 at a canter this season, but Al Khelaifi believes the arrival of so many world-class players will have a beneficial effect on all of the French league's clubs.

"We're helping Ligue 1, not playing against it," he claimed. "When PSG multiplies its international notoriety by signing Ibrahimovic, it's also a strategic investment for Ligue 1."

Less enamoured

One man who might be less enamoured of the way PSG do business is Michel Platini, the French president of UEFA who's been forced to watch his country's principal club seemingly cock a snook at his much-trumpeted Financial Fairplay rules, whereby clubs must not spend more than they earn and which comes into effect in the 2013-14 season.

PSG made no comment on the day about how they intend to balance the books, understandably preferring to celebrate their remarkable coup in signing Ibrahimovic.

The player's agent, Mino Raiola, was much more forthcoming, saying: "UEFA is always causing problems in football. But if you start getting your knickers in a twist about what they want, then you're finished."

For Ibrahimovic and PSG, though, it looks like being just the start.

Howard Johnson

Landmark...Paris Saint-Germain have taken Ligue 1 to a new level with the signing of Ibrahimovic

"This is not an issue for sentiment. It's not an issue for nostalgia. It's about being the best athlete in the world in your own place, in your own sport"

IOC chairman Jacques Rogge defends Team GB manager Stuart Pearce's decision to omit David Beckham from his Olympic squad

GOALS we'd like to see again

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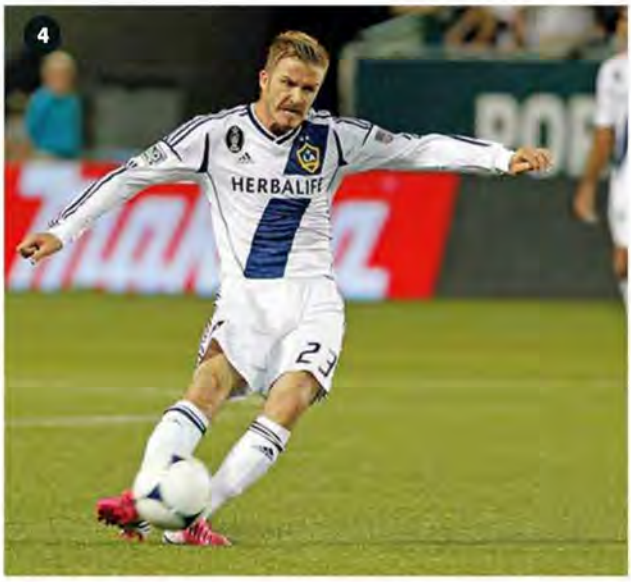

1 JO
Atletico Mineiro v Gremio
This goal is all about the assist from Bernard, as he skilfully flicks the ball over two defenders and delivers a volleyed pass, which sets up Jo to volley home from six yards.

2 MARCOS TAVARES
Maribor v Lokomotiv Moscow
A thunderbolt of a free-kick fired into the near top corner.

3 LUIS SUAREZ
Uruguay v Chile
Some nimble footwork, a turn of pace and an acute finish as he scores the second goal of his hat-trick in a pre-Olympic Games friendly.

4 DAVID BECKHAM
LA Galaxy v Portland Timbers
After some one-touch passing, he curls the ball into the top corner from 30 yards.

5 YEVGENI SHCHERBAKOV
Sokol Saratov v Spartak Tambov
The Russian third division produced this wonderful chest-trap, turn and volley.

6 LOIC REMY
Marseille v Sion
Passes the ball into the top corner of the net with the side of his foot in a pre-season friendly.

WINNERS

CORINTHIANS
The Brazilian club finally won the Libertadores Cup, beating Boca Juniors 3-1 on aggregate in the Final.

SEATTLE SOUNDERS
Having beaten Philadelphia Union to reach this year's Final, Seattle have yet to lose a game in the US Open Cup since joining MLS in 2009.

HARRY KEWELL
The ex-Liverpool and Leeds United forward was named Australia's best-ever player by a panel of experts and a public vote.

LOSERS

EGYPT
The seven-time winners will miss the 2013 Africa Nations Cup after being knocked out by Central African Republic.

RANGERS
Scottish champions a record 54 times, the club were expelled from the Scottish Premier League as a result of their financial meltdown.

RONALDINHO
Lost a £500,000 deal with Coca-Cola after he was filmed drinking a can of Pepsi at a press conference to announce his signing for Atletico Mineiro.

LAWS

No more debate...goal-line technology is to be introduced

IFAB votes for GLT

The International FA Board (IFAB), at a meeting in early July, approved the use of goal-line technology (GLT) and the system of additional assistant referees (AAR) that is already being used by UEFA in the Champions League and Europa League.

The eight votes of the International Board – one each of the British home associations and four on behalf of the world federation – were cast unanimously in favour of stepping into a brave new world.

However, UEFA is unlikely to adopt GLT in its competitions in the foreseeable future – for the simple reason that no clubs have it installed.

A small minority – such as England, Germany and Italy – are expected to introduce it in 2013-14. But the likelihood is that it will not enter European club competition – and then only in the knock-out stages – for at least five years.

IFAB gave the go-ahead for the use of two GLT systems: the camera-based Hawk-Eye and the sensor-based German/Danish GoalRef collaboration. FIFA is planning to use both GLT systems at the Club World Cup in Japan in December. One or both will also be used at the Confederations Cup in Brazil next summer and the 2014 World Cup finals.

UEFA president Michel Platini's opposition to GLT had damaged the cause and credibility of the five-officials AAR system, which he has championed. In fact, GLT and AAR undertake different jobs, which makes it perfectly proper for FIFA to consider using both systems at the 2014 World Cup.

A report by UEFA over more than 1,000 matches played under the AAR system assessed a higher percentage of offside decisions and significant value in the "deterrent effect" in reducing the amount of "unseen" foul play in the penalty box at corners and free-kicks.

Keir Radnedge

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Spain's quick-passing game lacks football's greatest skill

Twelve years ago in this column, I was extolling the virtues of Spain – though, at that time, they looked like a team that was never going to win anything. That's to let you know that I can claim a long-time adherence to the Spanish style. And that is also by way of unloading some of the guilt I feel as I now pick fault with it.

The Spanish have most beautifully reminded us that football is a game that is best played with the ball on the ground. That is where it can be coaxed and cajoled by the skilled players. The intricacy and artistry of such a game exposes the sheer crudity of a style based on aerial play in which the ball spends long periods in the air, uncontrolled by anyone.

My problem with Spain now is that, having got the ball back where it belongs, they fail to make much use of what is surely the sport's supreme skill: dribbling. The supreme skill, the unique skill, the most exciting and the most entertaining skill, going back to the days when the sport was known as "the dribbling game."

> The unique skill, the most exciting skill, goes back to the days when the sport was known as "the dribbling game"

The atrophy of dribbling in the sport is not to be blamed on Spain. A thoroughly unpleasant anti-dribbling culture has been allowed to grow up within football which sees dribbling as nothing more than a circus act, hot-dogging performed simply to show off and make fools of defenders.

A few years back the anti-dribbling mentality came to the surface in, of all places, Brazil. In 2002 a player was yellow-carded for performing a series of step-overs on front of an opponent, with the referee judging him guilty of trying to provoke his opponent.

Under that mentality, the defenders feel entitled to retaliate, to foul and kick the dribblers.

Dribbling has become a dangerous, and therefore an endangered, skill. Robinho's early dribbling exploits for Santos in Brazil were met with hostility and veiled threats.

"He could end up having his leg broken," said Gremio goalkeeper Danrlei. Muricy Ramalho, at the time the coach of Sao Paulo, regretted: "It seems that today you can't do a nice dribble any more."

Some players still try. Cristiano Ronaldo certainly does, and he in turn has been threatened. "After two minutes we will normally have to attack Ronaldo so much that he will have to leave the field," was Belgium goalkeeper Stijn Stijnen's matter-of-fact comment.

But it is of course Lionel Messi who currently personifies the magic of dribbling. It is Messi who makes Barcelona so much more complete a team than Spain. More complete, more dangerous and certainly more exciting. The brilliance of Messi's curling left-footed shot that scored the winning goal for Argentina in a recent 4-3 win over Brazil was unmistakable. But the quick surging dribble that led up to it, those few moments of thrilling suspense, made this goal so much more than the shot itself. Just as the final shot with which Diego Maradona scored in 1986 against England was totally eclipsed by the brilliance of the dribbling that preceded it.

Wonderful goals, complete football goals. We don't get much dribbling from Spain. Why is that? Have the anti-dribbling forces won this battle? Have they made their view, that dribbling is a provocation, the orthodox view? Is the cynicism of "he had to take him down, what else could he do?" now so widely accepted that it's OK to ignore the rules of the game in order to stop a dribbler?

Spain, with their quick-passing, on-the-ground, possession game, have found a superb answer to the curse of defensive play. But have they also found it necessary to sacrifice football's most precious skill?

"I feel empty. I haven't got anything else to give to the club"

Juan Roman Riquelme announces, after the Libertadores Cup Final defeat to Corinthians, that he is to leave Boca Juniors

BRAZIL

Unknown hero of the Libertadores

In today's globalised world of football, everyone knows everyone, tapes of opponents are studied exhaustively and there is little room for surprise – which makes the dramatic introduction of 21-year-old Romarinho into the first leg of the Libertadores Cup Final all the more remarkable.

An 83rd-minute substitute in Boca Juniors' imposing Bombonera stadium, the lithe support striker found the net with his very first touch – and scored one of the most important goals in the 102-year history of Brazilian giants Corinthians.

Before the match there was some confusion as to his identity, with the Argentinian media even mistaking him with the son of the great Brazil striker Romario. The puzzlement was not hard to understand as little-known Romario Ricardo da Silva had only just joined the club from second division Bragantino, where his record was impressive without being startling. Before that he had bounced around some minor Sao Paulo teams, but there was very little basis on which to analyse any potential threat that he might pose.

In truth there was one game on which to base any analysis – the previous weekend's local derby against Palmeiras in the Brazilian championship. Saving their first team for the Libertadores Final, Corinthians picked a reserve side and, given his first start, Romarinho scored twice.

Having seen something he liked, coach Tite drafted the youngster into the Libertadores squad, chiefly because of an injury to utility man Edenilson.

Super sub... Romarinho puts Corinthians level in the first leg against Boca Juniors

With six minutes left, and Corinthians on their way to defeat in Argentina, the mark he made could hardly have been more dramatic. Emerson spotted Romarinho cutting in from wide on the right and put him through on goal with a clever pass. Keeping his nerve, he waited for Boca goalkeeper Agustin Orion to make his move and then dinked a subtle finish over him and into the back of the net.

"This kid is very talented and has something about him," said the great Ronaldo, a former Corinthians favourite. "To come on in the Final of the Libertadores and score with his first touch...we've got to keep an eye on this kid for the 2014 World Cup."

While all of Brazil now wanted to know the Romarinho story, Tite wisely kept him well hidden, ensuring that the feet of his secret weapon were fixed firmly on the ground for the second leg. But in the event he was not used. At 1-0 in Sao Paulo he was stripped and about to come on when a second goal went in and there was a change of plan.

Nevertheless, Romarinho has earned himself a place in Corinthians' history even if he never scores another goal again – which seems highly unlikely.

With a number of first-team players set to move on, and some of the club's strikers at the veteran stage, he will surely have plenty of opportunities – and over time some flesh will be put around the bare bones of the story of the Libertadores mystery man.

Tim Vickery

Success...Romarinho lifts the Libertadores Cup

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"Spain encourage team players. We just encourage players"

Gerard Houllier sets out what he sees as the main difference between the Spanish and French systems of youth development

REPORTS we couldn't make up

1 Fans of Spanish second-tier club Recreativo de Huelva are so appalled by the club's new Minnie Mouse-style away shirt that they have organised a campaign to get the kit design changed. Kit supplier Hummel defended the design, pointing out that it had only 10 days to come up with two new kits after taking on the contract at the last minute.

2 The unlikely figure of Carlos Tevez popped up at the Open Championship at Royal Lytham & St Annes – as a caddie for fellow Argentinian Andres Romero.

The pair became friends last season when Tevez took to the golf course during his enforced sabbatical from Man City, and even won a pro-am tournament in Buenos Aires.

Romero made the Open final cut but fell out of contention on the final day. With Tevez carrying his bag, he only managed to shoot a final-round 82.

HEROES & VILLAINS

STEVE ZAKUANI

Returned to action for Seattle Sounders after 15 months out with a double leg-break. He made a point of hugging and swapping shirts with Colorado Rapids' Brian Mullan – the player who was banned for 10 matches for the tackle that inflicted the injury.

Gracious...Zakuani (right)

SOKRATIS DIOUDIS

Greece's reserve goalkeeper came off the bench and with his very first touch saved a penalty against England in the semi-finals of the European Under-19 Championship.

Dramatic...Dioudis

FRANCESCO TOTTI'S DOG

Ariel, the Roma captain's pet labrador, was reported to have rescued an eight-year-old girl and a 64-year-old man who were in danger of drowning in Civitavecchia, a seaside resort north-west of Rome.

Life saver...Ariel

BRENO

The former Bayern Munich defender was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison after being found guilty by a Munich court of setting his house on fire last year.

Jailed...Breno

Sold...Wojciechowski

JOZEF WOJCIECHOWSKI

The Polonia Warsaw owner "sold" the Polish first-division club to second-tier GKS Katowice, whose owners planned to merge both clubs to form a new top-tier club, KP Katowice.

TAL BEN HAIM

The Israeli defender refused to take a cut in his £36,000-a-week contract at Portsmouth, forcing the League One club closer to liquidation.

Big wage...Ben Haim

"Too bad for my critics. Everyone loves me here"

Bad-boy Corinthians striker Emerson savours his team's Libertadores Cup triumph

■ OBITUARY

JOE McBRIDE
(1938-2012)

A prolific striker, he was part of Celtic's 1967 European Cup-winning run, scoring against Zurich and Nantes but missing the Final in Lisbon against Internazionale through injury. Capped twice by Scotland, he passed away following a stroke.

Super Celt...McBride scored 86 goals in 94 appearances for Celtic

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Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Rodgers is well placed to help Liverpool overcome the fear factor

Rarely has a summer seen so many changes of manager among the major clubs of English football and the Premier League. Tottenham Hotspur, Chelsea, Aston Villa and Liverpool have all appointed new permanent bosses, along with fresh faces at middling clubs such as Norwich City, Swansea City and West Bromwich Albion.

The merry-go-round has also bucked the recent trend of clubs appointing managers past their 60th birthday. This time the emphasis is on youthful energy and ambition, with the likes of Roberto Di Matteo, Paul Lambert, Andre Villas-Boas and Michael Laudrup. It will be much to the improvement of the league.

One of the most fascinating choices was made by Liverpool, who plumped for 39-year-old Brendan Rodgers to replace taciturn Anfield legend Kenny Dalglish.

Some think this is a major gamble given the relative inexperience of Rodgers, but I disagree. The style revolution he brought to Swansea, with his team of relative journeymen often bewitching big-name opponents with their fluid football, was the most profound success and legacy of last season's Premier League. He was the obvious choice for a club of rich playing heritage like Liverpool and his fearless approach will invigorate Anfield.

What Rodgers achieved with such panache at Swansea was to put the lie to the old British view that a team can't play attractive passing football when a club has meagre financial resources – a view epitomised by managers such as Tony Pulis and Sam Allardyce.

The thoughtful approach of Rodgers also stands in stark contrast to the macho culture as revealed in the court case involving Chelsea captain John Terry; the bleak reality that extreme and offensive verbal sledging is considered the norm.

Will the Rodgers style revolution succeed at Liverpool? Let's hope so – not only for the sake of a great club, but also as a template for the rest. English football needs to encourage kids to play the possession game, to learn to play their way out of tight areas. It needs to kill the old mantra of "get rid". Football played with fear has dominated for too long, proving the ultimate undoing of the England team at Euro 2012. It wasn't that Steven Gerrard and the rest couldn't pass through the team from defence to attack – it was that they were too scared to trust themselves to do so regularly.

The essence of the work of Rodgers at Swansea, and what he will surely bring to Liverpool, is the absolute demand to play with courage.

> What Rodgers will bring to Liverpool is the demand to play with courage

When Swansea conceded a match-deciding goal at home to Manchester United last season, a pass between defenders that was intercepted, the manager took total responsibility. He said that he had ordered the team to play out from the back and any blame for failure would be his alone.

They carried on in fearless fashion – and the more they played, the more they flourished and the more they were admired.

One of the immediate dilemmas for Rodgers at Liverpool is what to do with players he has inherited who do not fit his philosophy. Chief among those is Andy Carroll: a classic, old-fashioned, English centre-forward. When Rodgers said he might countenance a loan move for Carroll there was instant interest from promoted West Ham United, where Allardyce is now the manager. The striker himself wasn't so sure. He made noises about wanting to stay – and good on Carroll if he wants to play the Rodgers-way and prove he is more than just a battering ram.

There is a phrase heard too often in the British game, one Carroll will be familiar with. It's the one that says "we tried to play too much football" – by which people mean players trying too often to pass the ball to team-mates.

I wince every time I hear the words. That's what the game is: football. Why be scared to play too much of it? WS

"This is the challenge I've been waiting for"

Louis Van Gaal (on the left) lights the *Oranje* fuse after being reappointed Holland's national coach

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Boss...Stimac

EUROPE

DIDIER DESCHAMPS, who captained France to victory in the 1998 World Cup and the European Championship in 2000, left his position as coach of Marseille to take over the national side from Laurent Blanc.

Former Ajax, Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach **LOUIS VAN GAAL** took charge of Holland following Bert Van Marwijk's resignation.

IGOR STIMAC replaced Slaven Bilic as coach of Croatia. The 44-year-old, who won 53 caps and played alongside Bilic for his country during the 1990s, previously had spells in charge of Hajduk Split, Cibalia and NK Zagreb.

WALDEMAR FORNALIK, who led Ruch Chorzow to the runners-up spot in Poland's Ekstraklasa last season, replaced Franciszek Smuda as national coach.

Paris Saint-Germain led the way in the early stages of the summer transfer window, signing **THIAGO SILVA** and **ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC** from Milan, along with **EZEQUIEL LAVEZZI** from Napoli. For a list of all the latest arrivals in Europe's big leagues this summer, go to www.worldsoccer.com

DAVOR SUKER was elected president of the Croatian Football Federation. The former striker, who takes over from Vlatko Markovic, helped his country to third place at the 1998 World Cup and won the Champions League with Real Madrid the same year.

Former Portugal striker **NUNO GOMES** joined English Championship club Blackburn Rovers from Braga.

India captain **SUNIL CHHETRI** joined Sporting Lisbon but will play for the Portuguese side's reserves.

Back in business...Capello returns to the international stage

Capello takes charge of Russia

FABIO CAPELLO, who resigned as England manager in February, is the new coach of Russia's national team. The Italian replaces Dick Advocaat, who was at the helm during the team's disappointing Euro 2012 campaign, before leaving to take charge of PSV in Holland.

GIANFRANCO ZOLA was named manager of Watford after the English second-tier side were purchased by the Pozzo family, who also own Serie A's Udinese and Granada of La Liga.

Installed...Zola at Watford

MARC OVERMARS joined Ajax as their technical director. The former Holland, Arsenal and Barcelona winger was previously a member of the backroom staff at Go Ahead Eagles.

SOUTH AMERICA

DIEGO FORLAN joined Brazilian side Internacional after his contract with Italy's Internazionale was terminated by mutual consent.

Roma's Brazil defender **JUAN** also left Serie A, returning to his homeland to sign a two-year contract with Internacional.

Liverpool midfielder **MAXI RODRIGUEZ** joined Argentinian club Newell's Old Boys for an undisclosed fee.

Uruguayan coach **GERARDO PELUSSO**, who led Olimpia to second place in the Paraguayan apertura championship, replaced Francisco Arce as head of Paraguay's national side.

RUBEN ISRAEL resigned as El Salvador coach and took charge of Paraguayan club side Libertad.

History maker...Seedorf

CLARENCE SEEDORF, the only player to have won the UEFA Champions League with three different clubs: Ajax (1995), Real Madrid (1998) and Milan (2003 and 2007) – signed for Brazil's Botafogo.

Uruguay striker **SEBASTIAN ABREU** made the 22nd move of his career, joining Figueirense from Brazilian rivals Botafogo.

CONCACAF

Former Italy and Milan defender **ALESSANDRO NESTA** signed for MLS club Montreal Impact.

Former Honduras coach **JUAN DE DIOS CASTILLO** took charge of El Salvador's national side.

Colombia-born **ENRIQUE SANZ** was appointed as the new general-secretary of CONCACAF.

Scotland's former Rangers and Celtic striker **KENNY MILLER** joined MLS side Vancouver Whitecaps.

MLS capture...Miller

"I wouldn't accept a coach who wants to win at any price"

Barcelona president Sandro Rosell has a dig at Real Madrid boss Jose Mourinho

Appointments, sackings and loans

AFRICA

Moroka Swallows' **GORDON IGESUND** was appointed coach of South Africa. He will be assisted by former national captain **LUCAS RADEBE**. Swallows named **ZECA MARQUES** as their new boss.

Senegal caretaker boss **JOSEPH KOTO** signed a two-year deal to take charge on a permanent basis, while Angola named Uruguayan **GUSTAVO FERRIN** as their head coach. Mali appointed Frenchman **PATRICE CARTERON** to succeed compatriot Alain Giresse as national coach.

Full-time...Koto

MANUEL JOSE, who quit Al Ahly of Egypt earlier this year in the wake of the Port Said tragedy, was put in charge of Iran's Persepolis.

ROGER LEMERRE, France's Euro 2000-winning coach, took charge of Algerian club CS Constantine.

Ex-Morocco national coach **MOHAMED FAKHIR** took charge of former club Raja Casablanca on a two-year contract.

Former Mamelodi Sundowns coach **ANTONIO LOPEZ HABAS** replaced Roger De Sa in charge at South African club Bidvest Wits.

ASIA

Mali midfielder **SEYDOU KEITA** joined Chinese Super League side Dalian Aerbin from Barcelona.

Former Blackburn Rovers striker **YAKUBU AIYEGBENI** joined China's Guangzhou F&G and scored the only goal in the 1-0 victory over local rivals Guangzhou Evergrande on his debut.

Cracking start...Yakubu

SEBASTIAO LAZARONI, who was Brazil coach at the 1990 World Cup, has taken charge of Qatar SC ahead of the start of the Qatar Stars League in September.

Frenchman **BERTRAND MARCHAND**, who was previously with Raja Casablanca of Morocco, joined Qatar's Umm Salal.

Former international striker **HOK SOCHETRA** replaced Lee Tae-Hoon as coach of Cambodia's national team.

Brazil striker **NILMAR** signed for Qatar's Al Rayyan on a four-year deal from Villarreal, who were relegated from the Spanish top flight.

LEONARDO PISCULICHI, who is a former Qatar Stars League player of the year, has joined Shandong Luneng in China from Al Arabi.

Central Coast Mariners' long-serving captain **ALEX WILKINSON** joined South Korea's Jeonbuk Motors.

EUROPE

GARETH SOUTHGATE stepped down as the Football Association's head of elite development. The ex-England international defender and Middlesbrough manager said that he does not wish to be considered for the FA's new post of technical director.

CONCACAF

Scottish coach **JOHN SPENCER** parted company with MLS club Portland Timbers, who had not won an away game in the league all season.

AFRICA

KNOWLEDGE MUSONA, who joined Augsburg on loan from Bundesliga rivals Hoffenheim this summer, quit the Zimbabwe national team after the football association's chief executive officer, Jonathan Mashingaidze, suggested he was involved in match fixing related to June's World Cup qualifying matches.

ASIA

Al Wasl sacked **DIEGO MARADONA** after the UAE side finished last season without a trophy.

OUT

Potless... Maradona

Riquelme quits Boca

Boca Juniors playmaker **JUAN ROMAN RIQUELME** announced he was leaving the Argentinian club after their Libertadortes Cup Final defeat by Corinthians. The 34-year-old was recently linked with China's Shanghai Shenhua, who are coached by former Argentina coach Sergio Batista.

Empty...Riquelme said he has nothing left to give Boca

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Not guilty...Chelsea captain Terry (left) leaves court during his trial for a racially aggravated public order offence

The wrong decision

Ambiguity and anticlimax. I disagree with those who maintain the police were right to bring the John Terry case to court. In truth, the Football Association were gazumped by the Metropolitan Police, who allegedly were constitutionally bound to follow up any complaint, and they seemingly had one, from a member of the public (in fact a copper).

The FA were reduced to conducting their own investigation after Terry had been exonerated, when the ground had been cut from under their feet. To punish him in any way after the magistrate had decided he couldn't be found guilty would surely open them up to a legal challenge – and defeat.

Yes, it was an unedifying incident. Yes, Terry's language was obscene. Yes, the initial provocation seemed to come from Anton Ferdinand himself. But what post-trial waffle has ensued. The BBC TV programme *Newsnight* managed to dig up some nonentity from an organisation one's never heard of who irrationally accused the FA of being too slow to act.

As the first senior football correspondent years ago to take up the cudgels for black players, at a time when they were shamefully traduced and despised in the English game, I'm still displeased at what the cancer of political correctness has done to such a serious subject, despite the heartening progress which has been made in recent years.

Not long ago, Alan Hansen dared to use the word "coloured" about black players, and the hounds of PC hell descended on him. How sad that he should make a grovelling apology. After which it was pointed out that one of the oldest and most respected anti-racist bodies in the USA is The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. A body which sent Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate for the US presidency, away with a flea in his ear, when he tried to soft soap their national conference.

John Terry – with Steven Gerrard, arguably the only successful England players in the recent Euros – has what may politely be called a chequered career, though the FA were surely out of order when they deprived him of the England captaincy when he was charged with racist abuse, long before the matter came to trial.

In the event, what should have been dealt with swiftly and effectively by the FA put huge sums of money into the lawyers' pockets. Even if Terry had been found guilty, he would have got off with a negligible £2,500 fine. Being found guilty by the FA would, in all probability, given the Luis Suarez verdict, have cost him much more than that.

Bribes...Havelange

> There is no way of reforming FIFA. It should simply be abolished

No reaction

A further irony of the Terry-Ferdinand case is provided by the fact that it is dwarfed in terms of racism with what goes on in football at large.

One of the more risible moments of the recent Euros was when Ukraine's coach Oleg Blokhin, apparently with no sense of shame or of the ridiculous, declared there was no such thing as racism in Ukrainian football.

This, from the man who, on more than one unabashed occasion, has vituperated viciously against the presence of black players in Ukrainian football, with no evident reaction from FIFA, with its phoney, virtually abandoned, policy of Kick Out Racism.

Abolish FIFA

Belatedly, FIFA has moved in on Joao Havelange and his equally repugnant former son-in-law, Ricardo Teixeira, over the millions of dollars they extracted in bribes from the now defunct ISL organisation.

Havelange was kept in power as FIFA president by its supine member countries for all of 1974 to 1998, while Teixeira ruled supreme in Brazil until only a few months ago when, at last, he was forced to stand down as leader of the country's 2014 World Cup committee.

Sepp Blatter is accused of having known all about the scam. But then, there is no way of reforming FIFA.

It should simply be abolished. WS

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Plenty more Mr Nice Guy

Spain's success at Euro 2012 means Vicente Del Bosque's qualities as a coach will finally be recognised, says Sid Lowe

"We had good players." That's what Vicente Del Bosque always says. And, up to a point, he is right of course; he has indeed always had good players. When he was coach of Real Madrid, he worked with Raul, Roberto Carlos, Fernando Redondo, Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane. As Spain coach he has worked with Xavi, Andres Iniesta, David Villa, Iker Casillas, Sergio Ramos and Xabi Alonso. The greatest generation in Spanish football history, some of the best players there have ever been.

John Toshack noted once that Del Bosque rode to success on the coat-tails of other men's work. At Madrid, Toshack himself claimed to have laid the groundwork, streamlining the squad and getting rid of problematic players, bequeathing a team with which Del Bosque won the European Cup. With Spain, Toshack said, Luis Aragones had won Euro 2008. Not only that, he had changed the squad, hastening the retirement of Raul, Santiago Canizares and Michel Salgado, and found a style that Spain could follow. Del Bosque turned up to find a new identity and mindset. All he had to do was hold the wheel steady.

It is a familiar assumption. Vicente Del Bosque is often described as a "nice man", which, incidentally, he is. He is extraordinarily popular and incredibly well liked; there is a warmth and decency about him that comes across immediately, even if those on the outside tend to see him as a quiet, almost sad character. But while "nice man" is a compliment, it is a very backhanded one, expressed almost as a criticism. By reducing Del Bosque's qualities to being "nice", there is a failure to recognise that he is also a good coach. For all his popularity, some still doubt that he is.

They shouldn't. Spain's success at Euro 2012 means that Del Bosque has now taken charge of Spain's national team for two major tournaments – and won them both. At both tournaments, there can be little argument that Spain were worthy winners, either. Del Bosque had sought control and few teams can have exercised control like this Spain team. They conceded just once all tournament. Over the last two tournaments, Spain have played seven knock-out games, including Finals. They kept clean sheets in all of them.

Del Bosque never wanted to be a coach and never expected to be one either. Yet in four years at Real Madrid, he won two league titles and two Champions Leagues. Now he is Spain's most successful coach ever. Let's just run through that total again: two league titles, two Champions League titles, a European Championship and the World Cup. Good players, sure. But is that really enough to explain the success?

Tactical shift

An unexpected tactical shift was behind Madrid's eighth European Cup win, shifting to a three-man central defence and dynamic wing-backs. At the World Cup in South Africa, he defended Sergio Busquets against fierce criticism and continued to use him alongside Alonso, where Aragones had used just Marcos Senna. Now, no one questions Busquets' claim on a place. At Euro 2012, he continued with the two-man central midfield role, then there was the false no9 debate. And that whole Spain-are-boring thing.

During one interview in Poland, Del Bosque told Spanish television: "I'm not angry." They had asked him because the day before he had done something not very Del Bosque-like. Normally so measured, normally so accommodating, so understanding, he had spoken out in the face of criticism, complaining

Quality...Alonso was arguably Spain's outstanding player at Euro 2012 this summer

that Spain had gone from "rich man to poor man too quickly" and didn't know how to "value what we're doing".

Spain had got through the group stage and were on course still but, he said, the atmosphere was negative, downbeat. Not just outside Spain but inside. Even his own players had treated it as if it was nothing. "I saw other teams hugging and celebrating when they got through the group," Del Bosque noted. Spain's players had not.

Winner...Del Bosque led Spain to a second trophy

Many appeared to assume that winning Euro 2012 was easy, an obligation. Anything less would be a failure. Never mind the absence of Villa, Spain's all-time top scorer, or of Carles Puyol, the man Del Bosque referred to as the "soul" of the *seleccion*. Never mind the tiredness of a team whose players had accumulated more minutes over the course of the season than anyone else. Never mind that when most teams had already come together for pre-tournament training, beyond the UEFA cut-off point Athletic Bilbao and Barcelona were still playing the Spanish Cup Final.

The kind of argument normally applied to Del Bosque was now being applied to the whole *seleccion*: well, yeah, but you should win, shouldn't you? Anyone would win with this team. Right?

No, not really. As Del Bosque noted quietly, but firmly: "Everyone has a right to an opinion, but I am the only one who actually has to make a decision." And the thing is, Del Bosque's decisions have a habit of coming off. If as they say once is chance, twice a coincidence and three times a pattern, then a pattern develops.

When Spain won the Final 4-0, they put some of the debates to bed. Vicente was vindicated. Four goals. Against Italy. Boring? Alonso was arguably Spain's outstanding player at the tournament. Ramos was immense at centre-back. Cesc Fabregas, the false no9, created the opener in the Final and finished the tournament with two goals of his own plus the decisive penalty that sent them to the Final.

And more than half of the squad had not played four years earlier. Yes, a style, an identity had been laid down but there had been changes too, an evolution.

And there will be more. Asked what he would do after the competition was over, Del Bosque replied: "prepare for the World Cup."

> "Everyone has a right to an opinion, but I am the only one who actually has to make a decision" Vicente Del Bosque

Divisive...Van Persie upset the squad

HOLLAND

Second chance for Van Gaal

Louis Van Gaal, the only Holland coach to fail to qualify for a major championship since 1986, has been given a second chance. Van Gaal has succeeded Bert Van Marwijk, who quit after a humiliating Dutch performance at Euro 2012.

The 60-year-old Van Gaal, who has a contract until the 2014 World Cup, wasn't the Dutch FA's first choice. However, Guus Hiddink is staying at Dagestan club Anzhi Machachkala and other candidates such as Frank De Boer (Ajax), Ronald Koeman (Feyenoord) and Frank Rijkaard (Saudi Arabia) weren't available. And with the clubless Co Adriaanse and Ruud Gullit not seen as suitable candidates, Van Gaal was the only serious option.

Obvious choice...Van Gaal was Holland's only serious option

Humiliation...Van Marwijk quit

Van Gaal's first spell ended at Lansdowne Road in 2001 when the Republic of Ireland's Jason McAteer scored the goal that blocked *Oranje*'s entrance to the World Cup.

A few weeks later, at his emotional

press conference, he blamed everybody but himself for the failure. With the Dutch FA far from pleased, the feeling was that he would never be asked to do the job again.

However, Van Gaal has always said that coaching one of his personal big five – Holland, Germany, Spain, Argentina or England – at a major tournament is the missing link in his successful career. So it wasn't a surprise that he agreed.

Van Gaal, out of job since his resignation at Bayern Munich, was the main characters in the Ajax soap, when the supervisory board unsuccessfully tried to appoint him behind Johan Cruyff's back. Cruyff, who has had closer ties to the Dutch FA since the appointment of Marco Van Basten in 2004, was quick to react on the news of his arch rival's appointment, calling it "a hasty decision".

Past mistakes

The big question is has the uncompromising Van Gaal learned from the mistakes of his first spell? Back then he made a mistake by treating his players as he had done when they were youngsters, winning the 1995 Champions League with Ajax. However, in 2001 the likes of Patrick Kluivert were mature men, playing at Europe's top clubs and learning about styles of coaching.

Failing to adapt to different times was also the trap that Van Marwijk fell into. He was hoping that the same pupils who had reached the World Cup Final would deliver one more time. But even he knew better. "I was hoping for it, but I knew it would be difficult", Van Marwijk said after defeat by Portugal.

Although the players are mostly to blame for Holland's worst record at a major tournament since 1980 – pointless first-round elimination, coincidently after being World Cup runners-up in 1978 – Van Marwijk also made errors of judgement.

Rafael Van der Vaart and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar clearly couldn't cope with their role as reserves. They felt that they were never given a real chance. Huntelaar's negative attitude had such an influence that the striker was almost sent home.

What Van Marwijk seems to have ignored was that the status of Van der Vaart and Huntelaar had changed since 2010. In South Africa both had just been sent away by Real Madrid and were well down the picking order. In 2012 they are, respectively, a key player at Tottenham Hotspur and the Bundesliga's top scorer. They felt they should be given a proper chance.

By preferring Robin Van Persie as striker Van Marwijk divided the squad. The Arsenal player took full advantage of his status, withdrawing from the training exercises and refusing to talk to the press. With irritation within the team growing every day Van Marwijk turned a blind eye to Van Persie's behaviour.

A divided squad, top players out of form, *Oranje*'s sudden fatigue collapse after 20 minutes in every game, an insane travel schedule between Krakow and Kharkiv, and lack of quality in defence. It was soon clear to everyone that it was mission impossible for the team that topped the FIFA rankings only 12 months ago.

However, the Dutch FA's intention was to continue with Van Marwijk, who had renewed his contract until 2016.

A big clean-up was suggested but when the names of Van der Vaart, Huntelaar and John Heitinga leaked out as future casualties, Van Marwijk had reached boiling point. The secret list had only been known to his staff, so Van Marwijk felt betrayed.

It's now up to Van Gaal, who worked with several current players at the Under-20 World Cup in Argentina in 2001, to begin a new era. Over the years, at Ajax, Barcelona, AZ and Bayern Munich, he has shown that he can build a team from the bottom. That is exactly what is needed to restore goodwill and return Holland to the top. And it's exactly what Van Gaal needs to make his impressive coaching career – which has brought him 10 national titles and cups, four international club trophies – complete.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Gone...Blanc had been seen as the man to rebuild pride in the national side

> Van Gaal must restore goodwill and return Holland to the top

FRANCE

Deschamps is the man after drawing a Blanc

If there were a World Cup for shooting yourself in the foot, then France would be undisputed champions. After the infamous bus incident at the real World Cup in South Africa, when the players effectively refused to train in a pathetic display of in-fighting, there was a palpable sense of disconnect between *Les Bleus* and the French public, who saw their international players as spoilt brats unworthy of the nation's support.

Following the departure of Raymond Domenech as coach and the installation of Laurent Blanc directly after that disastrous tournament, there was a real sense of hope that a football man as widely respected as "*Le President*" would be able to rebuild bridges.

Pressure...Deschamps has a big task ahead

Going into Euro 2012 it seemed that there was every chance the French national team could be rehabilitated. Blanc had led the side on an impressive 21-game unbeaten run prior to departing for Poland and Ukraine, team spirit seemed good and there were plenty of people predicting that France would be a decent outside bet if things went their way. And then the wheels came off...

Things started respectably enough as Blanc's men drew 1-1 with England – as long as you discount a moment of petulance from midfielder Samir Nasri, that is. The Manchester City man scored an excellent equaliser, then celebrated by putting his finger to his lips and mouthing "*ferme ta gueule*" (shut your trap) in the direction of the French press – a response to some perceived media injustice. A workmanlike but efficient 2-0 win against Ukraine then seemed to put France in the driving seat for qualification for the knockout stages.

But things went badly wrong against Sweden, who were already packing their bags after two defeats. France were abject as they capitulated 2-0 and after the match stories started emerging from a porous dressing room of a massive bust-up, primarily between Blanc and Newcastle United's Hatem Ben Arfa.

Blanc admitted things got a bit hot,

Petulant...Nasri makes his feelings known after his goal against England

but that this was normal in football, which might well be true. But it failed to generate an "us against them" mentality. Rather, the reverse happened.

In the quarter-final against Spain, not only were France well beaten, there were two more instances of player idiocy, with Jeremy Menez having a row with the referee and Yann M'Vila appearing to refuse to shake the hand of either Blanc or his replacement Olivier Giroud when substituted. Neither incident sounds like much, but in the context of a team that had already tested public opinion to the limit, this was clearly a problem.

After their exit from the Euros an opinion poll reported that just 20 per cent of French people had any love for the national team. The French federation and its president Noel Le Graet were staring at another PR disaster.

A little far-fetched

Blanc duly resigned on June 30, while the federation tried to address the indiscipline issues by calling on Nasri, Ben Arfa, Menez and M'Vila to explain themselves. It's hard to imagine these well-heeled young men being too perturbed by being hauled in front of the headmaster. And the idea that they're deeply disturbed by the lack of love of their fellow countrymen seems a little far-fetched too. Surely it's only by performing out on the pitch that France can truly leave their woes behind.

The man charged with getting things back on track is Didier Deschamps, captain of the side that won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000. He took Monaco to the Champions League Final, hauled Juventus out of the second division in the wake of a match-fixing scandal and led Marseille to their first league title in 18 years back in 2010. But things ended badly at all three of those clubs, with Deschamps falling out with key figures.

Will the new man be able to deal with the power-brokers of the federation, once described as "a basket of crabs", while also qualifying for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil – which is far from certain as France are drawn in a qualifying group alongside Spain, with only the top team guaranteed qualification.

Deschamps is going to need a fair amount of guile and a huge dollop of luck if he's ever to restore French footballing pride.

Howard Johnson

OTHER COACHES ON THE MOVE

DICK ADVOCAAT (Russia) joined PSV Eindhoven
SLAVEN BILIC (Croatia) hired by Lokomotiv Moscow
FRANCISZEK SMUDA (Poland) resigned

Resigned...Smuda

EURO PLAYERS ON THE MOVE

JORDI ALBA (Spain) Valencia to Barcelona
MARIO MANDZUKIC (Croatia) Wolfsburg to Bayern Munich
THEODOR GEBRE SELASSIE (Czech Rep) Slovan Liberec to Werder Bremen
DANIEL PRANJIC (Croatia) Bayern Munich to Sporting Lisbon
NIKO KRANJCAR (Croatia) Tottenham to Dynamo Kiev
IVICA OLIC (Croatia) Bayern Munich to Wolfsburg
OLIVIER GIROUD (France) Montpellier to Arsenal
LUKAS PODOLSKI (France) Cologne to Arsenal
SOTIRIS NINIS (Greece) Panathinaikos to Parma
MARK VAN BOMMEL (Holland) Milan to PSV
LUUK DE JONG (Holland) Twente to Borussia Monchengladbach
FABIO BORINI (Italy) Roma to Liverpool
MIGUEL VELOSO (Portugal) Genoa to Dynamo Kiev
PAVEL POGREBNYAK (Russia) Stuttgart to Reading
ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC (Sweden) Milan to Paris Saint-Germain
MARCO DEVYCH (Ukraine), Metalist Kharkiv to Shakhtar Donestk

New challenge...Kranjcar

Bundesliga bound...De Jong

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Weak sides could lead to a revamp of Europe's premier continental competitions.

TIM VICKERY
in Sao Paulo

Corinthians triumph at last

Long Libertadores wait is over for Sao Paulo's biggest club

It was a long time coming, but the biggest club from the biggest city in South America finally got their hands on the Libertadores Cup. Corinthians beat Argentina's Boca Juniors 3-1 on aggregate in the Final, with two second-half goals from Emerson in the second leg, in front of their own fans in Sao Paulo's Pacaembu stadium, ensuring victory in the 53rd edition of the continental competition.

The first leg in Buenos Aires had finished 1-1, exploding into life in the last 20 minutes, but for the most part it was scrappy and occasionally spiteful.

If Emerson's goals in the return clinched the title, the one he made in the first game was equally important.

Hampered during the first half by an injury to Jorge Henrique, Corinthians coach Tite was forced to switch to a more rigid 4-2-3-1 formation with the introduction of veteran centre-forward Liedson as a substitute, and Boca found it much easier to pass their way through the Brazilians' midfield.

With the pressure building, the hosts took the lead in the final 20 minutes, Matias Caruzzo nodding a corner back across the face of goal which was turned home by right-back Facundo Roncaglia – who missed the return game as he was out of contract and unable to agree insurance terms prior to a summer move to Italian side Fiorentina.

Corinthians' unbeaten record in this season's competition looked done for, but with six minutes remaining they found some room with a move down the right flank which evaded Boca's defensive funnel. Emerson played a glorious diagonal pass that put sub Romarinho through on goal and, with his first touch of the entire campaign, he slipped a subtle finish over keeper Agustin Orion to equalise.

Boca almost salvaged victory in the last minute when Lucas Viatri headed left-back Clemente Rodriguez's cross on to the bar but, from two yards out, on-loan Ajax striker Dario Cvitanich nodded the rebound wide.

Safety first

The return followed a similar pattern – which was no surprise in a meeting of two well-matched and somewhat similar teams – and while neither could be properly described as defensive, both are cautious, experienced and mature sides who put safety first.

There was, however, a question mark against Boca. What would happen if they needed to chase the game?

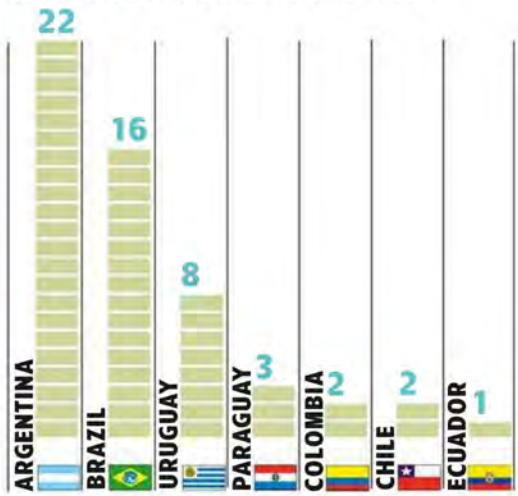
Pushing forward was always likely to leave their central defender Rolando Schiavi in open space and at the age of 39 his lack of pace could be a problem. For this reason the opening goal in the second leg was vitally important.

Boca settled far quicker, with little forward Pablo Mouche threatening damage when he cut in from wide on

Champions...full-back Fabio Santos lifts the Libertadores Cup surrounded by his Corinthians team-mates

LIBERTADORES CUP WINNERS

Despite Corinthians becoming the third Brazilian team in the last three years to claim the Libertadores, Argentinian clubs have still won more titles than their rivals



the right. But Corinthians' Emerson soon established himself as the most dangerous player on the field. With his pace, strength and tight skills, he caused problems both wide on the left and when he drifted infield, seeking to exploit the absence through injury of Boca's left-sided centre-back Juan Insaurralde.

It was down this channel that

> Corinthians, who now qualify for the Club World Cup, are only the sixth side to win the Libertadores unbeaten

Emerson wriggled his way through on goal, only to be halted by a last-ditch tackle from Leandro Somoza. But in the process Somoza collided with his keeper Orion, who was injured and forced off just after the half hour.

Eight minutes after half-time, Orion's replacement, Sebastian Sosa, was picking the ball out of the net. Boca failed to clear a free-kick and a superb backheel from Danilo put Emerson behind the defence to volley home.

It was the moment of truth for Boca and, apart from a Caruzzo header that brought a diving save from Corinthians keeper Cassio, their attack was found wanting, unable to gain a physical advantage and with centre-forward Santiago Silva making little impression.

With the visitors defence now exposed the outcome was never in doubt, especially after 71 minutes when Emerson intercepted a sloppy attempted pass from Schiavi and raced away to score a second.

Corinthians, who now qualify for December's Club World Cup in Japan, are only the sixth side to win the Libertadores Cup unbeaten and they conceded just four goals in their 14 games in the competition. Tite's side flitted between a 4-2-3-1 set-up and something best described as a 4-2-4-0. In the latter, Henrique and Emerson, nominally the strikers, would track the forward runs of the opposing full-backs, attacking midfielders Danilo and Alex closed down space, and the compact composition of the team made them very hard to play through. Throughout the campaign the team showed the same solidity and collective identity that carried them to last year's Brazilian title.

While Corinthians' 22 goals in those 14 matches is not an outstanding return, this year's tournament was marked by defensive meanness. From the quarter-final stage onwards, in a total of 14 ties, on only two occasions did a team score more than one goal: the 2-0 victories of Boca in their semi-final against Universidad de Chile and Corinthians in the second leg of the Final.

But, on a more positive note, if there were fewer goals this year, there were more people watching them.

Average crowds in this year's Libertadores Cup were just below 18,000 – which represents a healthy 13 per cent increase on last year. WS

SOEL OWCHARDS
in Buenos Aires

First victory in last clausura

Arsenal win final version of the old-style championship

The build-up to the final day of the season in Argentina had all the usual drama, tension, menacing threats towards players and inevitable conspiracy theories. This year there were three teams challenging for the title, while four were battling to avoid the drop – or, at the very least, earn a stay of execution and go into the relegation play-off. Down in the second division, the top four could potentially finish level on points, requiring an extra game to decide who would play in the play-off and who would go straight up.

But there was also one glaring problem this time: the same club could be crowned champions and then be relegated. In the worst case scenario, they would have to play a championship play-off, followed by a relegation play-off.

The bizarre situation came about due to the frailties of a system that crowns champions after six months but relegates clubs based on their performance over three years.

Tigre had battled so hard to stave off relegation that they topped the table on the penultimate matchday of the season, but in the end the blushes of the Argentinian Football Association (AFA) were saved. A draw with Independiente meant Tigre missed out on the clausura title but avoided the drop. "I'd take staying up over winning the title," claimed coach Rodolfo Arruabarrena in the build-up.

Despite being only two points behind Tigre going into the last game, apertura winners Boca Juniors were more interested in their upcoming Libertadores Cup Final against Corinthians and they put out a reserve side for their game away to All Boys. The gamble failed to pay off and they were beaten 3-1. They also lost the continental Final as well.

In the end it was left to Arsenal de Sarandi to take the glory with a 1-0 win over Belgrano thanks to a goal from Lisandro Lopez. For the club from the city of Avellaneda in the province of Buenos Aires it was a first national championship, adding to their 2007 Sudamericana Cup success. With the smallest fan base in the top flight the club has always struggled to attract support away from the two neighbouring giants whose colours merge to make Arsenal's home strip: the red of Independiente and the blue of Racing.

Controversial win

Inevitably, however, it was a controversial win, with Arsenal being Julio Grondona's club. The man who has presided over the AFA since 1979 is not just a supporter, he founded the club in 1957. His brother Hector, who did not live to see the club crowned champions after he passed away in April, is the club's all-time top scorer and his son, Julito, the current president.

Cynicism surrounds any decision that is seen to favour Arsenal. Last year, coach Gustavo Alfaro, who led the team to their Sudamericana win and this year's title, wrote an open letter in reply to what he viewed as a particularly unfair editorial from the sports daily *Ole*. While listing his club's merits, he quoted Nietzsche and Einstein, saying: "It is more difficult to break down a prejudice than an atom."

While Arsenal registered the second-lowest points tally recorded by a champion – just 38 – in the history of the short seasons, they nonetheless profited on other team's errors. At any one point there were five teams in the running for the title and Alfaro built up a solid if not unspectacular side. Lopez and Guillermo Burdisso were particularly strong in the centre of defence, while the side looked to the flair and pace of Carlos Carbonero and the goals shared between Emilio Zelaya and Luciano Leguizamon. Goalkeeper and captain Cristian Campestrini kept his promise and cycled the 245km home after winning the title at Belgrano's Estadio Julio Cesar Villagra in Cordoba.

Perhaps Arsenal's title win in part defines the legacy of the short-season format, which after over two decades is now a thing of the past. But while the apertura/clausura era is over, its replacement is rather similar. The new format will have a single champion, decided by the winner of the Initial and Final tournaments, which replace the apertura and clausura. In its previous life, in 1991, this format gave the 36-year-old Marcelo Bielsa his first title as a coach, with Newell's Old Boys. Yet herein lies part of the problem. Boca Juniors, who lost to Newell's in that Final, count that "half" tournament as a title, even if the AFA does not.

The short seasons were introduced in 1991-92 with the intention of offering clubs – particularly the larger ones – a greater chance of winning a title. And

Full stretch...Arsenal's Leguizamon (right) is stopped by Claudio Perez of Belgrano

ARGENTINIAN CHAMPIONS

SEASON	APERTURA	CLAUSURA
02–03	Independiente	River Plate
03–04	Boca Juniors	River Plate
04–05	Newell's Old Boys	Velez Sarsfield
05–06	Boca Juniors	Boca Juniors
06–07	Estudiantes	San Lorenzo
07–08	Lanus	River Plate
08–09	Boca Juniors	Velez Sarsfield
09–10	Banfield	Argentinos Jnrs
10–11	Estudiantes	Velez Sarsfield
11–12	Boca Juniors	Arsenal

that saw coach Ricardo Caruso Lombardi fighting with his predecessor's assistant in the street, San Lorenzo held their nerve just enough to see off Instituto de Cordoba in the play-off and remain in the top flight.

Just as the relegation averages were designed to protect the more powerful clubs, so it should have protected those whose points averages were inflated by a title-winning season. Yet Banfield proved this was not the case. Champions in 2009, the club have been in chronic decline ever since the title-winning team was rapidly dismantled and they lost 10 of their last 15 games, with president Carlos Portell resigning shortly after they were relegated. His successor, Marcos Acuna, did likewise days later after receiving a death threat.

Whether the latest modification to the league is a success, and whether it diffuses the febrile nature of Argentinian football, remains to be seen. WS

> "It's more difficult to break down a prejudice than an atom"
> Arsenal coach Gustavo Alfaro complains about media cynicism towards his club

while River Plate and Boca Juniors dominated with 20 championships between them, Independiente and Racing were nudged down the ranks by Velez Sarsfield, who won seven titles. Clubs such as Banfield, Lanus and Arsenal won their first-ever league crowns, while Racing, Independiente and Argentinos Juniors won their first in decades.

The new changes represent a halfway house between the short and long-season format, but while there will now be only one champion per year, the issue of relegation is still a thorny one. The play-offs between the bottom of the first division and the top of the second have gone, but the infamous three-year points averages have not.

Last year River Plate went down, proving the system was not insurance enough for the grandees that it was designed to protect.

San Lorenzo's relegation in the early 1980s was the reason for introducing the averages, and this year they again struggled up until the final day to avoid direct relegation. Amid a media circus

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
CARLOS LUNA (Tigre)
His 12 goals not only played a vital role in keeping Tigre in the top flight, he also ensured that he finished as top scorer for the first time in his career. The 30-year-old former Racing Club and LDU Quito player is now in his third spell with Tigre and lies eighth in the club's list of all-time leading marksmen with 59 goals.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
JUAN SANCHEZ MINO (Boca)
Targeting a treble last season, Boca made squad rotation a necessity and the 22-year-old took his chance with some impressive performances, both on the left of midfield and at left-back.

COACH OF THE SEASON
RODOLFO ARRUABARRENA (Tigre)
Helped to mastermind an astonishing escape, clawing back a 17 and 38-point deficit in the points averages, on San Lorenzo and Banfield respectively, to avoid the drop.

JAMES MONTAGUE
in Beirut

Sectarian divide

National coach is attempting to unite a country's fans

Having married his dentist when he was last in charge of the national side a decade ago, coach Theo Bucker considers himself to be "half-Lebanese" these days. And since returning to Lebanon's senior footballing post in August 2011, the 64-year-old German has now taken the team to the final World Cup qualifying round for the first time in their history.

Not surprisingly, Bucker is treated like a celebrity when out and about in Beirut. "Lebanon football before I arrived wasn't under the carpet, it was deeply under the ground," he says of his second coming. "It was not existing at all."

Of the difficulties that have blighted the sport, many can be traced back to the domestic game.

Each club has a distinct religious identity, entrenched by the patronage of politicians who help fund them. Al Ansar and Al Nejmeh were backed by the Hariri family, who are Sunni Muslims, first by ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri – who was assassinated – and then by his son, Saad. Safa are supported by the Druze, Racing Beirut are the team of the Orthodox Christian community, and Al Ahed, who Bucker led to the Lebanese Premier League title last year, have strong links with Hezbollah and have their shirts sponsored by Hezbollah's TV network, Al Manar.

With the league steeped in sectarian trouble that mirrored the violence which led the country towards a vicious civil war between 1975 and 1990, fans had been banned from attending matches for over five years.

"The Lebanese are tired of all the problems of the past," says Bucker. "They are happy this is bringing them together. Now they have a very good reason to come back to the stadium.

"I believe it is very good for the nation. They have found something which is really uniting them. There's a deep love for football in the country, but before they had no home to dedicate their love. Now they have a home, now they can support their own team."

Highlighting the problems

The league game earlier this year between Tripoli SC and Al Ahed, at the Olympic Stadium in the northern city of Tripoli, only served to highlight some of

Clash...a fan lies injured after violence at a game between Safa and Al Nejmeh earlier this year

LEBANESE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

Twelve teams have won the domestic title since 1934, when the first national championship was played

AL ANSAR	13
AL NEJMEH	7
HOMENETMEN	7
AL NAHDA	5
HOMENMEN	4
AL AHED	3
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY	3
RACING BEIRUT	3
SIKA	3
AL SHABIBA MAZRAA	1
OLYMPIC BEIRUT	1
SAFA	1

Grounded...Adel Lami of Qatar fails to stop Lebanon's high-flying Zreik in June's World Cup qualifier

Patriot...Bucker has restored footballing pride

the problems still to be overcome.

The stadium that used to be the pearl of Lebanese football has long since fallen into disrepair after the army seized it to use as a base against the restive Palestinian refugee camps. The 108 fans that turn up to the game are closely watched by soldiers with machine guns who patrol the running track that surround the pitch. The pitch itself is a green and brown mess, destroyed by the helicopters that regularly land here, and two men with coffee cups do their best to scoop as much muddy water from the penalty box as possible before the teams emerge from the tunnel.

Khodr Arja, a 16-year-old Tripoli fan, cannot remember the last time fans were allowed into the stadium.

"It's new and we are happy to see it," he says from a near empty stand as the match degenerates in the mud. "The federation is not helping the audience to come here. They don't support us. You have to pay LBP5,000 (£2) and these are poor people.

"It should be for free. Look at the pitch. It is a farm, yes? The worst pitch in the world. Everything is bad."

But even a few dozen supporters at a game means progress.

"We don't see many fans but it's better than nothing. It is like a revolution in Lebanese football," explains Ali Hijazy, a football reporter with Al Jadeed TV.

"The football was miserable. Politics is a great reason why Lebanese football was bad. The politics is still here in Lebanese society, but Theo Bucker is working with the national team, with no politics or religious views. The Lebanese national team is doing the job that no politician can do."

> "The Lebanese national team is doing the job that no politician can do"
>
> Al Jadeed TV football reporter Ali Hijazy

The two teams grind out an excruciatingly bad goalless stalemate. Al Ahed's star player, 21-year-old midfielder Ahmad Zreik curses under his breath as he leaves the field. He's used to better than this, having spent five years working in his uncle's restaurant in Michigan and playing at college before Al Ahed called.

"Look at the field. It is not for soccer," he says, pointing to what had by now become a brown rectangle of wet dirt. "I left here to go with my family to the US, but then the team call me many times. They offered me the same money I was earning there."

Zreik was one of the beneficiaries of Bucker's new regime and was put straight into the national team just a few weeks after returning from Michigan.

"Every day I worked 14 hours in my uncle's restaurant," he continues. "Now I can dream of playing in the World Cup."

World Cup qualifiers

Having taken just one point from their first three games in their final qualifying group for the World Cup, the aspirations of making it to Brazil in 2014 – where as many as eight million Lebanese Brazilians would await them – may, realistically, be a little beyond Bucker. But there is no denying that he has given Lebanese football a reason to be proud of itself.

However, the real test of the nation's newly discovered unity on the terraces will come in September with the potentially volatile visit of Iran, whose political leaders are supporters of Hezbollah. WS

MIKE WALECHURCH
in Maidstone

Conca looking for a way out

Rift mars Guangzhou's chase for Champions League glory

Marcello Lippi is no stranger to dealing with prima donna players, balancing the demands of multi-millionaire footballers – with egos to match their bank accounts – with the needs of the club that employs both coach and star performer.

Having been lured to China by the promise of his own enormous salary – estimated at around £8million a year, for two-and-a-half years – Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning coach was soon trying to extinguish the smouldering embers of a dispute between Guangzhou Evergrande, his new club, and its leading player.

It was the arrival of the Brazilian league's two-time player of the year, Dario Conca, at the club for a record fee of £6.4m – and an annual salary to match – in July 2011 that sparked the current spending surge enveloping the Chinese Super League (CSL).

While Shanghai Shenhua's capture of Nicolas Anelka and Didier Drogba garnered the majority of the recent headlines, it was the ability of Guangzhou to lure a player of Conca's quality at the peak of his career that signalled Chinese football's intent.

But, a year after his much-heralded arrival from Fluminense, the Argentinian midfielder, who has so often been at the heart of all that Guangzhou have achieved over the past 12 months – is now agitating for a move back to Brazil.

The issue, publicly at least, has been Conca's dissatisfaction at being substituted by Lippi late in games in the CSL, something the 29-year-old has taken as an affront.

It's not the first time Conca has thrown a hissy fit at team management over what he perceives to be a slight against his undoubted talents.

Under previous coach Lee Jang-soo, Conca was handed a nine-game ban by the club after showing his displeasure at being replaced in an Asian Champions League defeat by Jeonbuk Motors in May. Having put his side ahead from the penalty spot, Conca was taken off with half an hour remaining as Guangzhou lost 3-1. As he left the pitch he sent a water bottle flying and refused to shake Lee's hand before going on to lash out at the coach on social media.

> "I'm not happy, something happened here that makes me feel sick"
> Dario Conca (vigorously kicking a water bottle after being substituted)

"I don't understand why they always sideline me with the excuse that I'm exhausted and need rest," said Conca on Sina Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter. "How could I score a crucial penalty if I'm not in condition? And why does the coach always have Conca take a rest?"

Had the ban been implemented fully, he would have missed the crucial Champions League group game against Buriram United two weeks later – a match that Guangzhou had to win to be sure of advancing to the last 16. However, progress in the continental championship was deemed more important than disciplining the club's highest-profile player and, not only did Conca start, he scored the winner in a 2-1 victory with an injury-time penalty.

Tellingly, the victory over the Thai champions marked Lee's last match in charge, with the South Korean – who led Guangzhou to their first league title the season before – pushed aside to make way for Lippi.

With the arrival of the Italian, the slate looked to have been wiped clean. Conca's management issues and his ban had been consigned to the past, and Lippi's job was to ensure not only that Guangzhou advanced to the quarter-finals of the Champions League but also that his new charges played more as a team than they had under Lee.

Challenge...Lippi

While Guangzhou had romped to the Chinese Super League title in 2011, Lee's team often felt disjointed, with the club's South American imports – Conca was joined in the starting line-up by Brazilian duo Muriqui and Cleo – often standing apart from the rest.

Lippi's task, therefore, was to not only ensure continued success at home but to build a team to challenge on the continental scene, and – utilising fully the immense wealth of the Evergrande Real Estate Group – the club's backers are making sure he has the tools to do the job.

Pursuit of glory

The arrival of Paraguayan striker Lucas Barrios from Borussia Dortmund for £8.6m will undoubtedly assist in the further pursuit of glory, while also underlining Guangzhou's serious attempts to not just sign expensive talent but to ensure they capture players who are still at their peak.

Also joining the Guangzhou revolution is China midfielder Huang Bowen, who upset fans at his former club Beijing Guoan by moving to southern China after promising he would rejoin the capital side upon his return from South Korea's Jeonbuk Motors.

Before the new arrivals came in, Lippi kept his end of the bargain, steering Guangzhou to a 1-0 win over Tokyo in the knockout stage of the Champions League – in what was only his second game in charge – to make Guangzhou the first Chinese side to reach the last eight of the competition since 2006.

Cleo scored the only goal as Lippi, for the first time but not the last, substituted Conca 15 minutes from time, setting a tone that ultimately reopened the wounds between player and club, prompting the Argentinian to seek a move. "I am not happy, something happened here that makes me feel sick," said Conca.

Lippi, meanwhile, is trying to keep the rest of his side focused on September's quarter-final first-leg tie away to Al Ittihad in Saudi Arabia. WS

AFRICANS IN CHINA

While Brazilian players remain the most popular imports in the Chinese Super League, Africans are not far behind

GHANA Lee Addy (Dalian Aerbin)

IVORY COAST Didier Drogba (Shanghai Shenhua)

MALI Frederic Kanoute (Beijing Guoan), Seydou Keita (Dalian Aerbin)

MOZAMBIQUE Simao Mate Junior (Shandong Luneng)

NIGERIA Gabriel Melkam (Qingdao Jonoon), Peter Utaka (Dalian Aerbin), Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Guangzhou R&F)

ZAMBIA James Chamanga (Dalian Shide), Isaac Chansa (Henan Jianye), Christopher Katongo (Henan Jianye)

High profile...Drogba

In the mood...Conca, in action against Tokyo in the AFC Champions League last 16, has a history of hissy fits since his arrival in the Chinese Super League

STEVE MENARY
in Dudelange

Falling standards

Fears are growing over the widening gap between the game's top and bottom

The sun shone on Luxembourg football in every sense at the start of this season's Champions League as last season's domestic double winners, Dudelange, roasted San Marino's Tre Penne 7-0 in a lopsided first round, first-leg tie played on a baking evening in the south of the Grand Duchy.

The score made the second leg in San Marino redundant but did little to impress watching Luxembourg Football Federation (LFF) president Paul Philipp.

"I think that was the worst team I have ever seen in European competition; they at least have to be fit," sighed Philipp the following day in his office at Luxembourg's Institute of Sport.

Tre Penne had four current San Marino internationals in their side in Dudelange, but three of their line-up were in their forties. The oldest was 48 – making him five years the senior of Luxembourg's national coach, Luc Holtz.

Philipp, who spent his career playing professionally in Belgium before retiring in 1985 and becoming coach of Luxembourg's national team for 16 years, is worried about the implications of such heavy scores. "The guys from UEFA are studying these results," he said. "No one is happy when a team is winning by a score like 7-0. That could be a reason for more pre-qualifying.

"Imagine that a team like [Tre Penne] played a major team from France or Germany. Imagine the result. It could be terrible."

Luxembourg has a long footballing history. The national team has entered the qualifying competition for every World Cup since 1934, while club side Spora took part in the second edition of the European Cup back in 1956.

Involvement in European competition is usually short-lived, but Dudelange's progress meant a proposed game for the national side in mid-July against French club Metz had to be cancelled as too many players would be playing in the second qualifying round of the Champions League, against Salzburg of Austria. This now means Luxembourg's first game of the season, against Georgia on August 15, will be the only game for Holtz's side before their opening 2014 World Cup qualifier at home to Portugal in September.

No contest...Dudelange (in yellow) cruise past Malta's Tre Penne in a Champions League qualifier

Returned home

Apart from a brief halcyon period in the 1960s, Luxembourg's national team has achieved little of note. Between 1995 and 2007 they failed to win a competitive game – a run that many believe was partly due to the three-year coaching reign of Denmark's former European footballer of the year, Allan Simonsen.

Simonsen left in 2004 and his successor, Guy Hellers, finally brought some stability. The arrival of Holtz two years ago continued that improvement until last season's final game, a dismal 2-0 home defeat by Malta. There were extenuating circumstances, however, as Holtz's most experienced full-time player, Mario Mutsch, who plays for Swiss club Sion, was sent off early on.

"It was a very difficult game," admits Holtz. "I tried to play a more offensive game, but the mentality was not there. The players of Malta wanted to win that game more."

The loss also exposed Luxembourg's wider shortcomings. Not so long ago the

team had between eight and 10 players playing abroad, including Jeff Strasser, who spent 15 years in Ligue 1 and the Bundesliga. These days better players try out for foreign clubs but often find life much easier back home.

National-team striker Aurelien Joachim, who was with Bundesliga side Bochum as a teenager but returned home after an injury, explains: "Every footballer who has a chance to play full time will take it as the championship in Luxembourg is not so strong. But after I got injured at Bochum I decided to do my studies and become a sport teacher."

Philipp was more forthright, saying: "The problem for our players is the easy life in Luxembourg. It's also more difficult as there are lots of players in

Comfort zone... international Joachim has experienced the up and downs of playing abroad

> "The problem for our players is life is easy in Luxembourg. It's much more competitive when they move abroad"
>
> LFF president Paul Philipp

Europe from Africa and the former Yugoslavia, so it's a competitive market.

"Here players get a job and some money from their clubs. When they finish they still have the job."

In 2003 the LFF abolished an old rule that restricted clubs to four foreign players, which was at odds with European Union regulations. A new edict insists that clubs have at least seven players with a Luxembourg licence, which players typically get between the age of eight and 12. Players do not have to be born in Luxembourg, but Philipp believes most are.

The LFF also runs an academy in Mondercange and has started trying to place players at youth level with professional clubs before they start another career. Around 25 young Luxembourgers are with a range of foreign clubs, from Bayer Leverkusen to Metz and Philipp's alma mater, Standard Liege, with the prospect of providing a better standard than at home. That, Philipp believes, is the future. WS

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AUSTRIA BUNDESLIGA

Defending champions make a chaotic start

New boys...Salzburg coach Schmidt (left) greets sports manager Rangnick

Salzburg's preparations began in chaos when Dutch coach Ricardo Moniz, who led them to a domestic double last term, quit two days into pre-season training and Brazilian winger Leonardo departed after publicly criticising team-mate Stefan Maierhofer.

Although he had one year of his contract still to run, Moniz – whose relationship with club owner Didi Mateschitz had been poor – walked out after a row over training methods.

His assistant Piet Hamberg briefly took charge before Roger Schmidt, who led Paderborn to fifth place in the German second division last term, was brought in, with former Schalke coach Ralf Rangnick hired as sports manager with the final say over transfers. This marked a return to the game for Rangnick, who quit Schalke last season due to exhaustion and was replaced, as coincidence would have it, by former Salzburg coach Huub Stevens.

Rangnick's first act was to kick out Leonardo, who had been given a second chance after previous indiscipline but blew it with his attack on Maierhofer, who scored 14 goals last season.

"We have a great squad but he is the exception," said Leonardo, who joined Feyenoord as a teenager and has never played in his homeland. "He just puts on a show. He must be happy to play with us as we all make him look better."

The new managerial double act face a tall order as they attempt to follow last season's success, but their main aim will be to get Salzburg into the Champions League group stage – something the team has failed to do since Red Bull took over in 2005, saying they would become one of the biggest in Europe.

Salzburg have fallen at the final hurdle of Champions League qualifiers four times, chiefly because they rebuilt extensively in the close season, often with expensive players, and entered the qualifiers with a team effectively untested. This time, however, there has been a change of emphasis with no major signings. Instead, four youngsters have been promoted from the club's junior side, who play in the third tier of the Austrian league.

> Rangnick's first act was to kick out Leonardo, who had publicly criticised team-mate Stefan Maierhofer

Salzburg's main challengers for the domestic title are likely to be **Rapid Vienna**, who have also decided to put youth first. Rapid, who won the last of their record-breaking 32 titles in 2008, will be playing their second season under coach Peter Schottel, having finished runners-up last time out.

Like most teams in the league, Rapid are under pressure to cut costs. "The squad has to become cheaper because a lot of older players with good salaries have left," says Schottel. "I don't want expensive, risky transfers.

"I don't believe in signing big-name players at the end of their careers. We prefer to make our own stars because it is through them that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Of Rapid's squad of 25 who began pre-season training, 13 were aged 23 and under. "It is a conscious decision to sign young players or promote them from the amateur team," adds Schottel. "This has proved the right thing to do. The boys have earned our trust."

He will be hoping that more can follow the example of Lukas Groszurek, who began last season struggling for a place in the youth team and ended it as a regular for the senior side, even scoring the goal that took Rapid into the Europa League.

Four of the other eight teams will start the championship under new coaches. Peter Stoger has taken over at **Austria Vienna**, promising a more attacking outlook than predecessor Ivica Vastic. Last season Stoger did well to keep **Wiener Neustadt** up after sponsors Magna departed and his successor, Heimo Pfeifenberger, formerly with second tier Grodig, is set for a battle to avoid the drop, along with **Mattersburg** and **Wacker Innsbruck**.

Ried, Cup finalists last season, made Heinz Fuchsbichler their coach, while Peter Hyballa will lead 2011 champions **Sturm Graz**, who faded badly last term.

Promoted **Wolfsberger**, in the top flight for the first time, can only dream of matching **Admira**, who qualified for this season's Europa League after gaining promotion the previous year.

Brian Homewood

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 21, 2012
Mid-season break
December 15, 2012 to February 14, 2013
Season ends
May 25, 2013

Role model...Rapid's Groszurek (right)

Rise...Admira are in this season's Europa League

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BELGIUM PRO LEAGUE

Hiring of Dutch coaches upsets the locals

Of the 16 teams in the country's top flight, five will have a Dutchman in charge this season. To add insult to injury, two of the country's top clubs have made high-profile appointments from Holland and only one of the five clubs with realistic championship hopes have a Belgian in charge.

Having taken Vitesse Arnhem into Europe last season and with a reputation for giving youth a chance, John Van den Brom could be a shrewd replacement for Ariel Jacobs at **Anderlecht**.

While at Dutch club Apeldoorn, he brought through future Belgian internationals Dries Mertens – who had been rejected by Anderlecht for being too small – and Nader Chadli, who failed to make the grade at Standard Liege.

He has already promoted four youngsters into the first-team squad at the Constant Vanden Stock Stadium, with Mehdi Tarfi already earning rave reviews. Other bright talents like Dennis Praet and Fernando Canesin can also expect more playing time this season.

Although wantaway stars Matias Suarez and Lucas Biglia have been persuaded to stay so far, Van den Brom named Brazilian striker Kanu captain during Biglia's pre-season absence. But although he has a useful squad at his disposal, the defence still looks in need of reinforcements.

Ron Jans arrived at **Standard Liege** from Heerenveen and impressed everyone by mastering French in three months. But on the field he has found a side unrecognisable from that of a few seasons ago when Marouane Fellaini, Steven Defour and Axel Witsel bestrode midfield. Now there are hardly any stars – unless one counts Jelle Van Damme, who will probably start the season in central defence, and Marvin Ogunjimi, who has returned to Belgium on loan after failing in Mallorca. One thing is certain: the fans – who are some of the most vocal in Belgium – will not stand for another "season of transition".

Mario Been is starting his second season at **Genk**, who are entering a post-Kevin De Bruyne period and have signed a couple of French players in his stead: Julien Gorius from Mechelen and Kortrijk's Steeven Joseph-Monrose. Gorius was one of the league's top midfielders last season, while Joseph-Monrose, formerly of Lens, is a quick, clever France under-21 winger and it is a surprise he hasn't returned to Ligue 1. Genk are highly ambitious and if they don't win a trophy this season Been could be looking for a new job.

Despite alleged financial trouble, former Club Brugge boss Adrie Koster's new club **Beerschot** have signed 10 players. Among them are three from PSV Eindhoven – including Funso Ojo, once tipped as Belgium's "next big thing".

Harm Van Veldhoven, a naturalised Belgian of Dutch origin, will have to cope with the loss of Gorius at **Mechelen**. Newly arrived from Roda, he has brought three Danes with him from the Eredivisie with the hope they can help improve on last season's disappointing campaign.

Last season's runners-up **Club Brugge** replaced Christoph Daum with Georges Leekens, who jumped ship from the national team. The media has been heavily critical of Leekens who has felt it necessary to state he moved for love of the club rather than money.

After signing several new players, Leekens has a big enough squad for two teams, but it's fair to say that Serb goalkeeper Bojan Jorgacevic is the only one sure of his place. In midfield, Vadis Odjidja must be hoping that he is given the responsibility that his talent deserves.

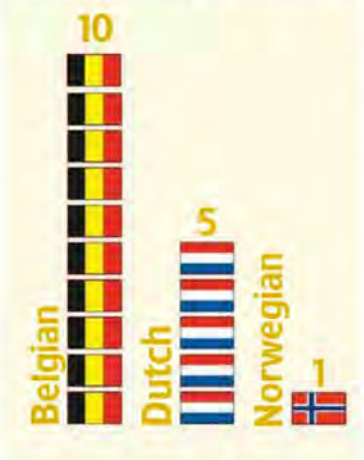
Another team with title pretensions, **Gent** are coached by Norway's Trond Sollied. He likes to attack but last year lacked a proven goalscorer. That job has

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 28, 2012
Season ends
May 26, 2013

> Standard Liege fans, some of the most vocal in Belgium, will not stand for another "season of transition"

NATIONALITIES OF COACHES



In charge...Van den Brom at Anderlecht

First choice...Club Brugge keeper Jorgacevic

now been handed to Shlomi Arbitman, who was on loan at relegated Westerlo. Two youngsters to watch out for are 17-year-old winger Benito Raman and Bosnian playmaker Armin Cerimagic, 18, who was on Internazionale's radar at the age of 12. Chairman Ivan De Witte is planning for a new stadium and will want a top-three finish at the very least.

Kortrijk and **Lokeren** will be happy just to reach the top-six play-offs. Hein Vanhaezebrouck's Kortrijk have lost their Anderlecht loanees Pablo Chavarria and Dalibor Veselinovic but he could be sent replacements. Although most of last year's squad remain, repeating their run to the Belgian Cup Final may be the best that can be hoped for.

Cup winners Lokeren also have more or less the same squad as last term, but they do possess one or two talented youngsters – such as teenage full-back Laurens De Bock – and a top-six spot could be feasible.

The only other club with a realistic chance of making the play-offs is **Cercle Brugge**. They have an enthusiastic and effective young coach in Bob Peeters and a striker, Igor Vetokele, who could soon make his mark.

The other six clubs are looking at mid-table at best. **Mons**, coached by Enzo Scifo, will be desperate to hold on to last season's league top-scorer Jeremy Perbet, although he is keen to seek pastures new. **Lierse**, **Leuven** and **Zulte Waregem** are three Flemish clubs who will all be happy just to maintain their top-flight status. Egyptian-owned Lierse seem short of quality, as do Leuven, who signed ex-international Logan Bailly.

Zulte have former Standard players Franck Berrier and Mbaye Leye, who both have something to prove. Croat striker Ivan Lendric, the Bosnian league's top scorer last season, is an interesting signing for Zulte.

The 16-strong line-up is completed by the two promoted sides, **Charleroi** and **Waasland-Beveren**. The latter, who rose from the ashes of Beveren, are trying to convince Thomas Radzinski to stay, while Charleroi are reputedly up for sale, have no coach and are run by a crazy chairman, Abbas Bayat, who has employed 11 coaches in three seasons – with one lasting just one game.

John Chapman

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Meme Tchite
Standard Liege to Club Brugge

The striker will become the first player to play for all of the "big three": Anderlecht, Club Brugge and Standard Liege.

My way...Scifo lays it out for his Mons players

CZECH REPUBLIC LIGA 1

Third time lucky for Lavicka?

Desperate for silverware...coach Lavicka needs to conjure up a change of fortune at Sparta Prague

Vitezslav Lavicka is under no illusions heading into his third spell as **Sparta Prague** coach. The 49-year-old knows winning the league and qualifying for the Europa League's group phase is the only option at the country's biggest club.

Sparta have gone two seasons without a title and missed out on silverware altogether last season, largely as a result of a painful rebuilding process.

Following the exit of iconic defender Tomas Repka and veteran goalkeeper Jaromir Blazek last term, midfielder Libor Sionko and centre-back Erich Brabec, both 35, were released over the summer.

Sparta , though, have had a quiet time in the transfer market, signing only back-up keeper Marek Cech and Spanish right-back Pablo Gil before pre-season training. Lavicka is also keen on Jablonec's David Lafata, who smashed the league's scoring record last season, but a deal has yet to be agreed.

Lavicka will also lean on young talent and players back from loan. Early signs are that Ondrej Svejdik will partner Jiri Jarosik in central defence. Svejdik, on loan at Dukla Prague last term, has yet to make his league debut for Sparta since joining in January 2011 but the partnership performed well in friendlies.

Much will be expected of captain Marek Matejovsky but Lavicka will also hope youngster Ladislav Krejci continues to excel, Cameroonian striker Leonard Kweuke rediscovers his goal touch and rising star Vaclav Kadlec stays injury free.

Sparta's quick, short-passing game will catch the eye, but if results go badly don't expect Lavicka's third tenure to last much longer than the other two.

Last season's title-winners **Slovan Liberec** have at least one eye on Champions League qualification. National team wing-back Theodor Gebre Selassie was the summer's only significant departure, but that has not stopped coach Jaroslav Silhavy searching far and wide for reinforcements. Along with Gebre Selassie's likely replacement Ondrej Kusnir, signed from Sparta, the new faces include recruits from Ukraine, Brazil and Congo, while midfielder Jiri Stajner remains a key figure.

> Winning the league and qualifying for the Europa League group phase is the only option for Sparta's coach

Pavel Vrba's **Viktoria Plzen** are still serious title contenders despite the loss of Vaclav Pilar to Wolfsburg and Milan Petrzela to Augsburg. Plzen's other Euro 2012 squad members – left-back David Limbersky, right-back Frantisek Rajtoral and midfielder Vaclav Darida – all look set to stay. Playmaker Pavel Horvath, at 37, is still an inspirational figure.

Mlada Boleslav should again be in Europa League contention, Miroslav Koubek having boosted his attack by signing Vaclav Ondrejka on loan from Slovacko, Lukas Magera (Ostrava) and Matej Sivric (Zizkov). **Jablonec**, under new coach Vaclav Kotal, need to bounce back from last season's disappointing mid-table finish which cost Frantisek Komnacky his job. **Teplice** will also expect to challenge for Europe under new boss Jan Prerost, the league's youngest at 34.

Dukla Prague may struggle to repeat last season's sixth place without out-of-contract Slovak striker Ivan Lietava, but Lubos Kozel's team should have enough flair to avoid a relegation battle. Talented but injury-prone midfielder Lubos Kalouda's signing from CSKA Moscow is an intriguing move. **Slovacko**, a respectable seventh last season, will again rely on Libor Dosek's goals to keep them out of trouble.

Sigma Olomouc start the new campaign without the handicap of last term's match-fixing-related nine-point deduction, but will miss veteran coach Petr Ulicny, who came out of retirement to lead them to safety and a Czech Cup win. Former Jihlava boss Roman Pivarnik is the new man in charge.

Financial problems continue to haunt **Slavia Prague**, but the hiring of former national coach Petr Rada and the return of Slovak playmaker Karol Kisel from Sydney suggest brighter days ahead. Slovak midfielder Martin Juhar's signing from rivals Sparta is controversial but he should be a useful addition.

Banik Ostrava, another traditional power struggling financially, will miss strikers Vaclav Sverkos, recovering from knee surgery, and Boleslav-bound Magera when the season begins and could easily be drawn into another relegation battle.

David Vavruska, who worked wonders to lead **Pribram** to ninth place last season, needs a new central-defensive partnership following the departures of Lukas Hejda and Jiri Krejci to Plzen and Pecs of Hungary respectively.

Frantisek Cipro faces another tough season at **Dynamo Ceske Budejovice** but can call on seasoned campaigners Tomas Repka and Rudolf Otepka. **Hradec Kralove** coach Jiri Plisek must prove there is life after Vaclav Kotal, who led them to the top flight in 2010.

Of the new boys, **Vysocina Jihlava** look the more likely to stay up. **Zbrojovka Brno**, promoted because Usti's stadium did not meet Liga 1 standards, face a struggle.

Sam Beckwith

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 27, 2012

Mid-season break
November 26, 2012 to February 21, 2013

Season ends
May 31, 2013

Key...Liberec's Stajner

Staying...Rajtoral

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Martin Zeman
Sparta Prague to Viktoria Plzen (on loan)

The left-sided midfielder's attitude has let him down in the past, but the 23-year-old has just the kind of talent of which Plzen coach Pavel Vrba can make the most.

Copenhagen turn to Jacobs for revival

Wonderful Copenhagen...new coach Jacobs is unveiled at the Parken Stadium

When **Copenhagen** fail to capture the Danish Superliga the consequence is always a summer of crisis and action. It doesn't happen very often – they have won the league eight times in the last 12 years, and five in the previous six, before being beaten by Nordsjaelland last season – but the response is always dramatic.

This time it meant the search for a coach of substance and achievement, a man who could galvanise the club anew. And Copenhagen believe they have found him in 58-year-old Ariel Jacobs, who guided Anderlecht to the Belgian title last season. He replaces Carsten V Jensen, who resumes his role as the club's director of sports, having been in interim charge following the sacking of Roland Nilsson midway through last term.

Jacobs' appointment has been well received at Denmark's biggest and most powerful club. Normally, the poaching is done by Belgium and Holland at the expense of the Danish game, so to reverse that trend is something of a coup.

Jacobs is only the second non-Scandinavian to manage Copenhagen, the first being the current England manager Roy Hodgson, who won the Superliga in his only season. This is considered a similar appointment, with Jacobs being a highly experienced and widely admired coach who is organised and fashions decent football.

He has arrived with an open mind, not least because there is a state of flux with players in the transfer window.

"I am not a coach who sticks to one system," said Jacobs. "Any tactical vision does not only depend on the coach but also on the players at his disposal."

The class and depth of the squad has diminished in the past couple of years from its peak under Stale Solbakken. Jacobs won't have been helped by the loss of international defender Matthias Zanka Jorgensen to PSV Eindhoven and the on-going transfer saga involving Dame N'Doye, the club's top scorer for the past two years. N'Doye has been courted by several foreign clubs, but with no firm offers Jacobs has been left irritated as he wanted a swift resolution to the matter. He did, however, receive a major boost with the signing of Denmark under-21 striker Nicolai Jorgensen on loan from Bayer Leverkusen.

Another irritation for Jacobs is the need to focus on the third qualifying round of the Champions League, while Nordsjaelland enter at the group stage. Copenhagen allowed another striker, Morten Nordstrand, to join the champions – which is either a move of great confidence or some folly.

> The class and depth of Copenhagen's squad has diminished from its peak under Stale Solbakken

Nordsjaelland have retained much the same squad that won the title last year, save for the loss of influential defender Andreas Bjelland to Twente. Coach Kasper Hjulmand knows it will be difficult to repeat last season's success, saying: "Every year our aim has been to improve on last time. But now we are top of the tree and everyone is aiming at us. It will be a different challenge but we will fight to the end."

Brondby used to be Copenhagen's strongest challengers but they haven't won the title for seven years. Although Lithuanian coach Auri Skarbalius has revived the mood, he admits the club has developed "a losing habit" that must change. Much will depend on whether veteran Dennis Rommedahl can remain fit and if Michael Krohn-Dehli stays after his fine displays at Euro 2012.

Of the rest, three clubs from Jutland – **AGF Aarhus**, **AaB Aalborg** and **Midtjylland** – appear best placed to challenge for places in the top half of the table. Peter Sorensen has inspired an Aarhus revival, while Aalborg coach Kent Nielsen, a hero of Euro 92, is confident they will be strong contenders.

However, Ole Nielsen, sports director of **Sonderjyske**, believes the majority of clubs will be looking downwards in fear rather than up in hope.

"This will be the hardest and most brutal Superliga season," says Nielsen, about his own club and others such as **OB Odense**, **Horsens**, **Silkeborg** and the promoted pair of **Esbjerg** and **Randers**. "I believe eight to 10 teams will be involved in the relegation struggle. Survival is our only aim."

Traditionally, Odense have been a club with higher ambition. But with the loss of experienced players such as Eric Djemba-Djemba and Bernard Mendy, perhaps realism is in order.

Jim Holden

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 13, 2012

Mid-season break
December 9, 2012 to March 1, 2013

Season ends
May 20, 2013

Confident...Aalborg's Nielsen believes it is onwards and upwards for his side

Brondby key...Krohn-Dehli (left)

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Nicolai Jorgensen
Bayer Leverksuen to Copenhagen

The dynamic young striker could add plenty of thrills as well as goals to Ariel Jacobs' side.

FROM THE MAKERS OF

WorldSoccer

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE NEW SEASON IN ENGLAND

ON SALE NOW

TV deal confirms Premier League pulling power

Getting ready...Manchester City and Kolo Toure (left) warmed up for the new campaign with a friendly against Dynamo Dresden

The England national side may have battled bravely through the Euro 2012 group stage this summer before their limitations were exposed, but there can be no doubting the strength of the English game at club level.

The financial power and enduring appeal of the Premier League were demonstrated during the close season with the announcement of a record domestic TV rights deal that will see clubs receive more than £3billion over three years, from the 2013-14 season.

The deal struck with BSkyB and British Telecom, who outbid current rights holders ESPN, represents a 71 per cent increase on the current domestic TV deal and will guarantee that even the bottom team in the league receives more than the £60.6m Manchester City earned for finishing last term as champions.

Premier League revenues are likely to be boosted further with a new foreign television deal and the biggest winners, as ever, will be the players and their agents, who are set to benefit from further increases in wages.

The irony of the new riches on offer was not lost on Arsenal, who were stunned by an announcement from their captain, Robin Van Persie. The Dutch striker declared that he would not be renewing his contract, which has one year remaining, leaving Arsenal with the dilemma of whether to keep him on their payroll or cash in before the transfer window closes on August 31.

Both Manchester clubs and Juventus have an interest in Van Persie who, after a meeting with club manager Arsene Wenger and chief executive Ivan Gazidis, said: "It has again become clear to me that we in many aspects disagree on the way Arsenal FC should move forward."

Wenger, having stood by Van Persie through long periods of injury, is entitled to feel aggrieved at such an attitude. However, his early transfer-market activity, signing Lukas Podolski from Cologne and Olivier Giroud from Montpellier, suggests Arsenal are more prepared for Van Persie's exit than they were for the departures of Samir Nasri and Cesc Fabregas this time last year.

Arsenal put a brave face on the situation and said they still hoped to negotiate a new deal with Van Persie, who employs Kees Vos as his agent, but also has Darren Dein – the son of former Arsenal vice-chairman David – as a "commercial advisor".

Dein has had a hand in most of the high-profile departures from Arsenal in recent seasons, including Fabregas and Nasri last summer, and Thierry Henry.

With the new TV deal kicking in from 2013, clubs will be more desperate than ever to avoid the drop this season. There has also been a rush to escape the second-tier Championship in time to enjoy the Premier League's new riches.

This summer there have been foreign takeovers at Nottingham Forest and Watford, and they will be competing with ambitious foreign owners at the likes of Cardiff City and Leicester City. All are keen to repeat the success of Reading's new owner, Russian tycoon Anton Zingarevich, who bought the Berkshire club for £25m from John Madejski earlier this year and within months was celebrating the club's promotion to the top flight.

Success in English football is rarely that easy to come by, as many of the new Premier League managers will discover this season. There were more managerial changes this summer than in the entire previous campaign.

Most of the new faces were not new, however. Tottenham Hotspur hired former Chelsea boss Andre Villas-Boas, while former Newcastle United manager Chris Hughton was installed at Norwich City, replacing Paul Lambert, who moved to Aston Villa. West Bromwich Albion chose former Liverpool and Chelsea number two Steve Clarke as their replacement for new England manager Roy Hodgson. Liverpool hired Brendan Rodgers from Swansea City, who turned to Dane Michael Laudrup – the only genuinely new appointment.

There may have been plenty of change in the dugouts but the only certainty is that not all of the new men will be around this time next year when the new TV cash comes on tap.

Gavin Hamilton

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 18, 2012
Season ends
May 19, 2013

Leaving...Van Persie

New boss...Rodgers left Swansea for Liverpool

ENGLAND PREMIER LEAGUE Team by team

ARSENAL

Manager
Arsene Wenger
Key arrivals
Giroud (Montpellier, Fra), Podolski (Cologne, Ger)
Key departures
Almunia (released), Denilson (Sao Paulo, Bra)

Club captain Robin Van Persie's refusal to sign an extension to a contract that expires next summer threatened to undo the summer's transfer dealings. But at least deals for Lukas Podolski and Olivier Giroud were completed early on. A top-four finish is still the expected target, irrespective of whether Van Persie stays or goes.

Foundation builder...Lambert

ASTON VILLA

Manager
Paul Lambert
Key arrivals
El Ahmadi (Feyenoord, Hol), Holman (AZ, Hol), Lowton (Sheffield Utd),
Key departures
Cuellar (Sunderland), Heskey (released)

Flirted with relegation last season and new manager Lambert will be looking to build solid foundations without spending the earth. A difficult task, but a mid-table finish is the most likely.

CHELSEA

Manager
Roberto Di Matteo
Key arrivals
Hazard (Lille, Fra), Marin (Werder Bremen, Ger)
Key departures
Bosingwa (released), Drogba (Shanghai Shenhua, Chn), Kalou (Lille, Fra)

A season of transition awaits the new European champions, with new signings Eden Hazard and Marko Marin lowering the average age of the squad following the summer departure of Didier Drogba. Caretaker boss Di Matteo was rewarded with a two-year contract after May's Champions League triumph, but he knows that, should he mess up, former Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola is the favoured choice of owner Roman Abramovich.

EVERTON

Manager
David Moyes
Key arrivals
Naismith (Rangers)
Key departures
Hahnemann (released), McFadden (released), Wallace (Tranmere)

Moyes continues to be coveted by other clubs but remains in situ at Goodison Park. A solid start will see them challenging for the European positions again.

Sound investment...Chelsea's Hazard (right) in a friendly with Seattle

FULHAM

Manager
Martin Jol
Key arrivals
Petric (Hamburg, Ger), Rodallega (Wigan)
Key departures
Johnson (QPR), Murphy (Blackburn)

Jol steadied the ship after the departure of Mark Hughes last summer, but he faces an anxious wait to see if the club can hold on to Moussa Dembele and Clint Dempsey. Without either key forward, they may struggle.

LIVERPOOL

Manager
Brendan Rodgers
Key arrivals
Borini (Roma, Ita)
Key departures
Aurelio (Gremio, Bra), Kuyt (Fenerbahce, Tur), Rodriguez (Newell's Old Boys, Arg)

All change at Anfield again, with highly-rated young boss Rodgers expected to bring some of his Swansea style to Merseyside. His willingness to dispense with £35million striker Andy Carroll was a bold declaration of intent. Fabio Borini is an interesting addition but further signings will be needed to make an impression on the top four in the near future.

Old and new...manager Moyes (right) welcomes Naismith to Everton

MANCHESTER CITY

Manager
Roberto Mancini
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Bridge (Brighton), Hargreaves (released)

The summer priority was to get the fringe players off the wage bill before new signings were made. Still the team to beat after last season's dramatic triumph but they will also face increased expectations on the European front.

MANCHESTER UNITED

Manager
Alex Ferguson
Key arrivals
Kagawa (Borussia Dortmund, Ger), Powell (Crewe)
Key departures
Fabio (QPR), Kuszczak (Brighton), Owen (released), Park (QPR)

With more money being diverted to service the Glazer family debt repayments, United face the prospect of falling further behind their "noisy neighbours" City. Japan international Shinji Kagawa and teenager Nick Powell are useful additions, but the continued presence of Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes (38 and 37 respectively) says it all.

NEWCASTLE UNITED

Manager
Alan Pardew
Key arrivals
Amalfitano (Reims, Fra), Bigirimana (Coventry)
Key departures
Best (Blackburn), Guthrie (Reading), Lovenkrands (released), Smith (released)

Surprised everyone last season but may struggle to repeat those feats, especially with new European commitments. A top-half finish is the minimum expectation.

Incoming...Amalfitano

NORWICH CITY

Manager
Chris Hughton
Key arrivals
Butterfield (Barnsley),

Staying the same...Hughton has overseen little transfer activity

Whittaker (Rangers, Sco)
Key departures
Whitbread (released)

New manager Hughton will be expected to build on last season. Little transfer activity, though striker Grant Holt agreed a new deal after demanding a transfer.

QPR

Manager
Mark Hughes
Key arrivals
Fabio (Manchester United), Green (West Ham), Johnson (Fulham), Nelsen (Tottenham), Park (Manchester United)
Key departures
Buzsaky (released), Gabbidon (released), Hall (released), Kenny (Leeds United), Ramage (released), Shittu (released),

Lucky to survive last season but some bold summer deals, especially getting Park Ji-sung and Fabio from Manchester United, suggest that they will be more comfortable this time around.

Comfortable...Park

READING

Manager
Brian McDermott
Key arrivals
Gunter (Nottm Forest), Guthrie (Newcastle), Mariappa (Watford), McCleary (Nottm Forest), Pogrebnyak (Fulham), Shorey (West Brom),
Key departures
Griffin (released)

Backed by a new Russian owner, but may struggle to repeat the achievements of last season's promoted teams – who all stayed up.

SOUTHAMPTON

Manager
Nigel Adkins
Key arrivals
Clyne (Crystal Palace), Davis (Rangers), Rodriguez (Burnley)
Key departures
Jaidi (retired), Connolly (released)

The south-coast club have enjoyed a rapid rise back to the top under Adkins, with promotions in successive years. Staying up will constitute success this season, but they will need canny deals in the transfer market.

STOKE CITY

Manager
Tony Pulis
Key arrivals
Jamie Ness (Rangers)
Key departures
Diao (released), Fuller (released), Woodgate (Middlesbrough)

The squad was stretched by the demands of the Europa League last season, so they will need new additions to avoid being dragged down.

SUNDERLAND

Manager
Martin O'Neill
Key arrivals
Cuellar (Aston Villa)
Key departures
Gordon (released), Gyan (undisclosed), McCartney (West Ham)

O'Neill's arrival reversed the decline that had set in under Steve Bruce last season, but whether they can rise to a higher level this campaign remains to be seen, especially with a slimmed-down squad.

SWANSEA CITY

Manager
Michael Laudrup
Key arrivals
De Guzman (Villarreal, Spa)
Key departures
Sigurdsson (Tottenham)

Laudrup was a leftfield appointment to replace Liverpool-bound Brendan Rodgers but also an indication that Swansea will continue with the possession-based attacking game favoured by their former boss.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

Manager
Andre Villas-Boas
Key arrivals
Sigurdsson (Swansea), Vertonghen (Ajax, Hol)
Key departures
King (retired)

Six months after being sacked by Chelsea, Villas-Boas begins his rehabilitation, replacing the sacked Harry Redknapp, who had a difficult relationship with chairman Daniel Levy. The handling of midfielder Luka Modric's future could be crucial to Spurs' fortunes.

New Spur...Vertonghen

WEST BROM

Manager
Steve Clarke
Key arrivals
El Ghanassy (Gent, Blg), Foster (Birmingham)
Key departures
Andrews (Bolton), Scharner (released), Shorey (released)

Clarke was a respected number two to Jose Mourinho at Chelsea and Kenny Dalglish at LIverpool but now has his first chance in his own right after replacing England manager Roy Hodgson.

WEST HAM UNITED

Manager
Sam Allardyce
Key arrivals
Diame (Wigan), Jaaskelainen (Bolton), Maiga (Sochaux, Fra), McCartney (Sunderland)
Key departures
Carew (released), Diop (released), Faubert (released), Faye (released), Green (QPR), Nouble (released)

The Championship play-off winners are back after one season away. Allardyce took time to win over fans with his playing style but they will be happy if he repeats the success he enjoyed in establishing Bolton in the top flight.

WIGAN ATHLETIC

Manager
Roberto Martinez
Key arrivals
Fyvie (Aberdeen)
Key departures
Diame (West Ham), Kirkland (Sheffield Wed), Rodallega (Fulham), Thomas (released)

Martinez was linked with Liverpool after engineering another great escape while playing attacking football. Another close shave.

Big chance...West Brom have given Clarke his first job as a manager

FRANCE LIGUE 1

Lightning unlikely to strike twice for Montpellier

Almost there...Montpellier celebrate the win over Lille last season that took them to the brink of becoming French champions

After the marvellous fairy tale that was the David of Montpellier pipping the Goliath of Paris Saint-Germain to the French league title last season, the question on everyone's lips is whether the south-coast minnows can again tweak the noses of the capital city aristocrats. Lightning tends not to strike twice, of course, so it would be an even greater miracle if Rene Girard's side were able to land back-to-back titles.

The difference between the two clubs is summed up by the new striker they have each signed for the new campaign. PSG have paid £24million for Napoli's highly rated Argentinian international Ezequiel Lavezzi, who was on the shopping list of any number of Europe's big boys, while Montpellier shelled out just £2.2m for Lavezzi's unknown compatriot, Emanuel Herrera from Chileans Union Espanola.

In addition, PSG have spent big bucks on Milan defender Thiago Silva and his clubmate, Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

But as Montpellier proved last season, regardless of how big or otherwise the names in their team, they have nothing to fear but fear itself. Well, fear and the poaching of all their prize assets, of course. So far it looks as if president Louis Nicollin has managed to fend off the wolves, with striker Olivier Giroud – Ligue 1's top scorer last season – the only key player having left so far.

Nicollin has even managed to bring in a couple of decent players – Toulouse skipper and defender Daniel Congre, and Nice's former Lyon midfielder Anthony Mounier – so whatever happens Montpellier will be no pushovers. In all truth it's hard to see Girard's side repeating last season's feat, but it would be a huge surprise if they were not up at the business end of the table throughout the campaign.

Lille appear to be the most likely to mount a serious challenge to PSG for the title. The 2011 champions have

OPENING FIXTURES

August 10, 2012
Montpellier v Toulouse
August 11, 2012
Evian v Bordeaux
Nancy v Brest
Nice v Ajaccio
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Rennes v Lyon
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Sochaux v Bastia
Troyes v Valenciennes
August 11, 2012
Reims v Marseille

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 10, 2012
Season ends
May 26, 2013

been busy in the close-season transfer market. Having lost their most talented player, Eden Hazard, to Champions League winners Chelsea and seen Joe Cole return to Liverpool at the end of his loan, boss Rudi Garcia has brought in Chelsea's Ivory Coast striker Salomon Kalou on a free transfer and France midfielder Marvin Martin for £7.8m. The diminutive former Sochaux man has a great touch and can really see a pass, so he'll certainly be an asset to his new club in a season in which they also move into a new 50,000-seater stadium, the Grand Stade Lille Metropole.

Nightmare campaign

Marseille will be hoping to put a nightmare 2011-12 campaign behind them this season. The southern aristocrats finished 10th last time out, a massive 34 points behind Montpellier and 31 behind arch-rivals PSG. Beating Lyon 1-0 to win the League Cup in April simply wasn't good enough and OM's season was dogged by in-fighting, with coach Didier Deschamps never looking remotely happy.

It was no surprise, then, when he jumped ship in early July and quickly found a lifeboat at the French Football Federation, who gave Deschamps a two-year contract to take over the national team in the wake of a dismal European Championship and the departure of Laurent Blanc.

Deschamps' replacement is the much-travelled Elie Baup, who seems to have lost his trademark baseball cap en route to the Velodrome. But having watched PSG getting stronger and stronger in recent times, Marseille supporters will be hoping that Baup – who has been out of work for three years since a difficult season at Nantes ended up with the club being relegated from the top flight in 2009 – can restore local pride. And quickly. With finances tight, the 57-year-old will have to be a wily operator. What is sure is that the club's first signing of the summer, striker Florian Raspentino on a free from Nantes, will have overwhelmingly underwhelmed the fans. It's a tough gig for Baup, no doubt about it.

Hard times ahead...Marseille's Achille Anani (left) and Oumar Diop shut out Sion's Vilmos Vanczak in a pre-season friendly

It was no surprise in Marseille when the unhappy Didier Deschamps jumped ship to the national team

Lyon's fourth place last term under Remi Garde was a pretty satisfactory return, given that the club's big-spending days are over for the time being. But sophomore years are always tougher and the one-time kings of French football will do well to emulate their last campaign, especially with a game-heavy programme in the Europa League to contend with.

Outside of last season's top four, it looks unlikely that the chasing pack of Bordeaux, Rennes, Saint-Etienne and Toulouse will be able to push on.

Europa League duty ...Lyon's Garde

The general belt-tightening in French football (with the exception of Paris Saint-Germain, of course) means all of these clubs have been keeping the purse strings pretty well drawn. Nobody in this group looks to have much stomach for mounting a bid for top-dog status.

It will be more interesting to see how Nice progress this time around. With former Lyon boss Claude Puel installed as coach in place of Rene Marsiglia and talk of a serious "project" now in motion, they might spring a few surprises, though it will probably be too soon to expect serious miracles.

Corsican club Ajaccio have also changed coaches, with former Brest man Alex Dupont taking over from Olivier Pantaloni. Many felt that Pantaloni had performed miracles in keeping the tiny club with a budget of just £12m in the top flight when they finished 16th last time around, but the 45-year-old decided he simply did not have the strength for another campaign and walked away.

Ajaccio will be joined by fellow Corsicans Bastia after they were promoted as champions from Ligue 2, together with Reims and Troyes.

Howard Johnson

Riviera challenge... Puel at Nice

Great expectations...Ancelotti (in cap) makes sure his Paris Saint-Germain players get the message

SUMMER COACHING CHANGES

	OUT ▲	IN ▼
NICE	Rene Marsiglia	Claude Puel
BREST	Corentin Martins	Landry Chauvin
AJACCIO	Olivier Pantaloni	Alex Dupont
MARSEILLE	Didier Deschamps	Elie Baup

FRANCE LIGUE 1 Team by team

Challenge...Dupont

AJACCIO

Coach
Alex Dupont
Key arrivals
Deville (Anderlecht, Blg), Diarra (Lorient), Sissoko (Metz)
Key departures
Debes (retired), Ilan (end of contract), Socrier (end of contract)

The plucky Corsicans just avoided the drop last season. The concern is where they will find the energy for another similar battle this time around. New coach Dupont may just bring it to the table.

BASTIA

Coach
Frederic Hantz
Key arrivals
Palmieri (Istres), Varenne (Cournon), Yatabare (Monaco)
Key departures
Diallo (Rennes), Robail (Nimes), Suarez (Arles Avignon)

Bastia finished five points clear at the top of Ligue 2 to earn promotion last season. But they have only one objective for the new campaign: to stay in the top flight.

BORDEAUX

Coach
Francis Gillot
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Krychowiak (Reims)

After a slow start last season, Gillot did well to haul the team up into fifth spot and a Europa League qualification slot. If he manages to pull off the same trick this time around he will have done well.

BREST

Coach
Landry Chauvin
Key arrivals
Benschop (AZ Alkmaar, Hol), Chafni (Auxerre), Dernis (Montpellier)
Key departures
Daf (Sochaux), Elana (Lille), Ewolo (Laval)

Brest arrival...Benschop

The departure of coach Alex Dupont after a bad run of results in April surprised everyone and most likely will not help this campaign. Brest will be more than happy with mid-table obscurity this season, especially with the loss of goalkeeper Steeve Elana to Lille.

EVIAN

Coach
Pablo Correa
Key arrivals
Dhaouadi (Club Africain, Tun), Wass (Benfica, Por)
Key departures
Farina (Energie Cottbus, Ger), Poulsen (end of contract), Rippert (end of contract)

The big surprise of last season – behind Montpellier's title win – was that this unfancied promoted club finished a creditable ninth. More of the same would be most welcome.

Red is the colour...Kalou has swapped Champions League winners Chelsea for Lille

LILLE

Coach
Rudi Garcia
Key arrivals
Elana (Brest), Kalou (Chelsea, Eng), Klonaridis (AEK Athens, Gre), Martin (Sochaux)
Key departures
Cole (Liverpool, Eng, end of loan), Domrane (Mouscron, Blg), Hazard (Chelsea, Eng), Jelen (end of contract)

Lille will be hoping for a serious crack at the title with some judicious signings on board and the boost of a brand new stadium.

LORIENT

Coach
Christian Gourcuff
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Diarra (Ajaccio)

Gourcuff has set higher standards than the last campaign's 17th-place finish and will not tolerate another season fighting the drop right to the death.

Aiming high...Gourcuff

LYON

Coach
Remi Garde
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Andrade (end of contract), Brandao (end of contract), Traore (end of contract)

With Paris Saint-Germain ever stronger, Marseille will have to show some bottle under new coach Baup and banish all memories of last season's 10th place. Can they mount a serious title challenge? Probably not this season.

Less expectation...Lyon's Argentinian Lisandro Lopez (in white)

Key departures
Belfodil (Parma, Ita), Ederson (Lazio, Ita), Kolodziejczak (Nice)

"Steady as she goes" is the order of the day for Lyon, who are in a conservative phase and will be more than happy to aim for European qualification and a Champions League slot if possible.

MARSEILLE

Coach
Elie Baup
Key arrivals
Raspentino (Nantes)

Food for thought...Baup

Remember the name...Nice's new signings will be trying to help coach Puel spring a few surprises

MONTPELLIER

Coach
Rene Girard
Key arrivals
Congre (Toulouse), Herrera (Union Espanola, Chl), Mounier (Nice)
Key departures
Dernis (Brest), Giroud (Arsenal, Eng), Lacombe (Clermont)

It's going to be harder to retain the title this season than it was to win it last term, but Montpellier will still be one of the teams to beat in the race for the Ligue 1 crown.

NANCY

Coach
Jean Fernandez
Key arrivals
Ayasse (Arles), Dampha (Neuchatel Xamax, Swi), Grange (Chateauroux)
Key departures
Calve (Caen), El Hamdaoui (Istres), Traore (Milan, Ita)

A satisfactory mid-table finish last season will have given coach Fernandez – starting his 18th season in Ligue 1 – confidence that he can improve his team this campaign.

NICE

Coach
Claude Puel
Key arrivals
Bautheac (Dijon), Delle (Metz), Genevois (Tours), Kolodziejczak (Lyon)
Key departures
Hellebuyck (retired), Mouloungui (Al Wahda, UAE), Mounier (Montpellier)

There's a lot of talk about what Nice might do with a new vibrancy at the club. It's unlikely to be anything more than steady improvement this campaign, though.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

Coach
Carlo Ancelotti
Key arrivals
Ibrahimovic (Milan, Ita), Lavezzi (Napoli, Ita), Silva (Milan, Ita), Verratti (Pescara, Ita)
Key departures
Ceara (Cruzeiro, Bra), Kamghain (Courtrai, Blg), Ngoyi (Troyes)

If PSG don't win the title the Qatari moneymen will be asking some serious questions. The arrival of Ibrahimovic says it all about their ambition.

REIMS

Coach
Hubert Fournier
Key arrivals
Devaux (Toulouse), Fofana (Toulouse), Krychowiak (Bordeaux)
Key departures
Amalfitano (Newcastle United, Eng), Fontaine (Rouen), Tainmont (Chateauroux)

Reims have a rich football history and will be welcome back in the top flight. They should have enough about them not to be looking over their shoulders.

RENNES

Coach
Frederic Antonetti
Key arrivals
Alessandrini (Clermont), Diallo (Bastia)
Key departures
Boukaka (Tours), Dalmat (Nimes), Hadji (Al Arabi, Qat)

A tough nut to crack last season under the hugely experienced Antonetti and it looks like it will be same again this campaign. They won't roll over for anyone, but probably won't move forward by much either.

Firepower...PSG hope the goals of Lavezzi (left) will bring success

SAINT-ETIENNE

Coach
Christophe Galtier
Key arrivals
Cohade (Valenciennes)
Key departures
Battles (retired), Ebondo (end of contract), Monsoreau (end of contract)

Signed up...Cohade

Almost snagged a surprise place in the Europa League qualifying rounds at the end of last season, but will need to find more firepower if they are going to push forward once again.

SOCHAUX

Coach
Eric Hely
Key arrivals
Daf (Brest), Kante (Panathinaikos, Gre), Pouplin (unattached)
Key departures
Davies (Randers, Den), Maiga (West Ham, Eng) Martin (Lille)

Sochaux need to stop flirting with relegation and match their ambitions off the field with some decent results on it. Hely, in his first full season in charge, has much to prove without star turn Marvin Martin.

TOULOUSE

Coach
Alain Casanova
Key arrivals
Blondel (Troyes), Zebina (Brest)
Key departures
Congre (Montpellier), Devaux (Reims), Riou (Nantes)

Toulouse always threaten to do something to turn heads in Ligue 1 yet always somehow seem to fall short. Can they do better? It's a big "maybe".

TROYES

Coach
Jean-Marc Furlan
Key arrivals
Darbion (Skoda Xanthi, Gre), Ngoyi (Paris Saint-Germain), Nivet (Caen)
Key departures
Beauvue (Chateauroux)

Promoted from Ligue 2 in third spot, Troyes have a decent coach with top-flight experience who might well be able to guide them away from the danger zone.

Top flight...Troyes' Yamissi

VALENCIENNES

Coach
Daniel Sanchez
Key arrivals
Nery (Saint-Etienne)
Key departures
Cohade (Saint-Etienne), Mfuyi (Servette, Swi), Pallois (Niort)

A small club that has consistently punched above its weight in recent seasons – and will be extremely happy to do the same again.

GERMANY BUNDESLIGA

Life at the top still looks great, 50 years on

When Titans clash...central defender Neven Subotic (left) clears from Franck Ribery as Borussia Dortmund pile on the misery for Bayern Munich in the German Cup Final

Exactly 50 years after a special convention of German football representatives voted to create the country's first national championship, the Bundesliga continues to go from strength to strength, a beacon of sound economic values, impressive infrastructure, fan-friendliness and, above all, entertainment.

Franz Kremer, the late president of Cologne who is widely considered to be the Bundesliga's founding father, must surely be beaming with pride as he puffs on his trademark cigar in that great boardroom in the sky. In the space of half a century, his dream has gone from drawing board to sporting, commercial and social phenomenon, and it says much for the model he put in place that, even in these times of worldwide austerity, it has carried on booming.

The Bundesliga may not quite have the glamour of the Premier League, La Liga or Serie A, but it does not want for attacking football, thrills and spills, and box-office appeal. Top-flight attendances have risen in each of the past 10 years, with last season's average of 44,713 being up 2,500 on the previous campaign. Given the affordability of tickets, the glut of comfortable, modern stadia and the deep-rooted love of the game in the country, it's hard to see the trend going into reverse any time soon.

As exemplified by the risk-heavy, all-or-nothing approach of current champions Borussia Dortmund, Germany really is the place to go for action, incident and the ball hitting the back of the net. For the best part of two decades the Bundesliga has outscored the other major European leagues. While there was a 20-goal fall-off in the total goals scored last term, an average per match of 2.86 was still enough for the Bundesliga to stay ahead of its English, Spanish and Italian counterparts.

Just as Germany's national team has benefited enormously from the millennium revamp of the entire

OPENING FIXTURES

August 24, 2012
Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen
August 25, 2012
Borussia Monchengladbach v Hoffenheim
Freiburg v Mainz
Augsburg v Fortuna Dusseldorf
Hamburg v Nuremberg
Greuther Furth v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
August 26, 2012
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Schalke

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 24, 2012
Mid-season break
December 15, 2012 to January 17, 2013
Season ends
May 18, 2013

youth-development system, so have the country's top-flight sides. Club academies and regional schools of excellence are churning out wave upon wave of technically accomplished and tactically astute young players and, encouraged by the strict financial guidelines all teams have to abide by, clubs need little encouragement to take the value-for-money home-grown route.

Last season the average age of a Bundesliga player was 25.76 years – the lowest figure since the 1973-74 season – and what's inescapable right now is the ever-growing band of starlets in their teens or early 20s. Notable performers on a regular basis include goalkeepers Ron-Robert Zieler of Hanover and Gladbach's Marc-Andre Ter Stegen; defenders of the class of Dortmund's Mats Hummels and new Bayer Leverkusen centre-back Philipp Wollscheid; the brilliant Dortmund midfield trio of Kevin Grosskreutz, Ilkay Gundogan and Mario Gotze; the ever-improving Bayern playmaker Toni Kroos; and bright-eyed forwards such as Schalke's Julien Draxler and Marco Reus, who has become the latest addition to the Dortmund young-guns club.

Two-horse race

Not that everything in the elite garden is blooming, however. Instances of hooliganism have become more numerous in the past couple of years, with cases of fans storming the pitch and missiles being aimed at players and assistant referees. There is also the fact that for a league that was once so closely matched – five different champions since the turn of the century – today's Bundesliga does seem to look like a two-horse race between Dortmund and Bayern.

Fan base...Borussia Monchengladbach's following show why the Bundesliga has the best average attendance in Europe

Bayern's hope is that Sammer's passion will drag them back to the highest step on the podium

Top dogs for the past two years, Dortmund undoubtedly have the edge at the moment. They have beaten Bayern in each of their last five encounters, and in marked contrast to their arch-rivals they are unified, totally free of fear and psychologically at peace. The combination of back-to-back Bundesliga losses and the nightmarish Champions League Final defeat by Chelsea has left the usually imperious Bayern in a state of some panic. And in the haze of such disappointment it was not particularly surprising a palace revolution ensued over the summer, with the club's general manager Christian Nerlinger unceremoniously dumped in favour of ex-German FA technical director Matthias Sammer, who coached Dortmund to the title in 2002.

Future...Draxler

Bayern's hope is that Sammer's passion, single-mindedness and never-quenched thirst for success will help drag them back to the highest step of the podium. But the move clearly has its risks. The word compromise does not exist in the Sammer lexicon and there is every chance of him coming into conflict with certain superstars on the books.

These are not especially great times for the traditional German powerhouses. Last season, Cologne, Hertha Berlin and Kaiserslautern all went through the relegation trapdoor in a blaze of ignominy, and if they are not careful Hamburg and even Werder Bremen could find themselves on the same path. Much better, it seems, to be a well-run provincial club on a budget. Take a bow Mainz, Freiburg, Augsburg and top-flight rookies Greuther Furth.

Nick Bidwell

New broom...Sammer has replaced Nerlinger as general manager at Bayern

BUNDESLIGA CHAMPIONS

Bayern Munich	21
Borussia Dortmund	5
Borussia Monchengladbach	5
Werder Bremen	4
Hamburg	3
Stuttgart	3
Cologne	2
Kaiserslautern	2
Eintracht Braunschweig	1
Munich 1860	1
Nuremberg	1
Wolfsburg	1

GERMANY BUNDESLIGA Team by team

AUGSBURG

Coach
Markus Weinzierl
Key arrivals
Bance (Al Ahli, UAE), Klavan (AZ, Hol), Moravek (Schalke), Musona (Hoffenheim), Ottl (Hertha Berlin), Petrzela (Viktoria Plzen, Cze), Philp (Jahn Regensburg), Sio (Wolfsburg), Voigt (Bochum)
Key departures
Brinkmann (Cottbus), De Roeck (Leuven, Blg), Kapllani (FSV Frankfurt), Ndjeng (Hertha Berlin), Rafael (Fortuna Dusseldorf)

Chairman Walther Seinsch may come to regret the backstabbing which led to the resignation of coach Jos Luhukay at the end of last season. Luhukay worked a minor miracle to keep the Bavarians afloat, a feat his successor, ex-Regensburg boss Weinzierl, may find hard to replicate.

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Coaches
Sascha Lewandowski and Sami Hyypia
Key arrivals
Carlinhos (Desportiva Brasil, Bra), Carvajal (Real Madrid, Spa), Fernandes (Club Universidad de Chile, Chl), Wollscheid (Nuremberg)
Key departures
Adler (Hamburg), Ballack (out of contract), Barnetta (Schalke), Corluka (Lokomotiv Moscow, Rus), Derdiyok (Hoffenheim), Giefer (Fortuna Dusseldorf), Jorgensen (Copenhagen, Den), Oczipka (Eintracht Frankfurt)

New boy...Wollscheid

Rightly praised for steadying the ship following the sacking of Robin Dutt last spring, Leverkusen's two-man coaching team urgently need to pull the Rhinelanders out of the comfort zone to which they too readily retreat. The argument they have shed too much experience in the close season is a valid one.

BAYERN MUNICH

Coach
Jupp Heynckes
Key arrivals
Dante (Borussia M'gladbach), Mandzukic (Wolfsburg), Pizarro (Werder Bremen), Shaqiri (Basle, Swi), Starke (Hoffenheim), Weiser (Cologne)
Key departures
Butt (retired), Olic (Wolfsburg), Petersen (Werder Bremen), Pranjic (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Usami (Hoffenheim)

Recruits...Shaqiri and Dante

After two years without a Bundesliga title, the pressure is on to reclaim the silver plate they regard as their birthright. And, to make matters worse, the trauma of defeat in the Champions League Final remains a live issue. Because of Euro 2012, their many internationals may not be as fresh and as sharp as they should be, but at least the Bavarians have recruited wisely in Brazilian centre-back Dante, Swiss dribbling virtuoso Xherdan Shaqiri and maverick Croatia striker Mario Mandzukic. There is more strength in depth now, with even Arjen Robben, Franck Ribery and Mario Gomez not guaranteed to start.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

Coach
Jurgen Klopp
Key arrivals
Bittencourt (Cottbus), Kirch (Kaiserslautern), Reus (Borussia M'gladbach), Schieber (Stuttgart)
Key departures
Barrios (Guangzhou Evergrande, Chn), Da Silva (released), Kagawa (Manchester United, Eng), Kringe (released), Rangelov (Lucerne, Swi)

Despite their successes of the past two seasons – the Bundesliga title in 2011 and a league and cup double last term – there seems no chance at all of this group of ferociously driven youngsters easing up. One sliver of hope for the rest of the league is that the Dortmunder are distracted by the Champions League, in which they unexpectedly flopped a year ago. All-action Japanese midfielder Shinji Kagawa's decision to leave for the Premier League would have been more painful if the Ruhr outfit had not already spent £13.5million on German attacking *wunderkind* Marco Reus.

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

Coach
Lucien Favre
Key arrivals
De Jong (Twente, Hol) Dominguez (Atletico Madrid, Spa), Hrgota (Jonkopings Sodra, Swe), Mlapa (Hoffenheim), Xhaka (Basle, Swi)
Key departures
Dante (Bayern Munich), Neustadter (Schalke), Reus (Borussia Dortmund)

Logic says the sale of defensive linchpin Dante and leading light Marco Reus – responsible for no fewer than 18 goals and 11 assists last term – has left Champions League pre-qualifiers Gladbach weaker. But talk of their

In at Gladbach...Xhaka

demise is premature. Tactical alchemist Favre is in his element cooking up a tasty dish from scraps, while director of sport Max Eberl has very much earned his corn with the acquisition of Dutch striker Luuk De Jong, Spanish defender Alvaro Dominguez and Swiss midfield regulator Granit Xhaka.

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

Coach
Armin Veh
Key arrivals
Aigner (Munich 1860), Celozzi (Stuttgart), Inui (Bochum), Lanig (Cologne), Occean (Greuther Furth), Oczipka (Leverkusen), Trapp (Kaiserslautern)
Key departures
Alvarez (Stuttgart Kickers), Bellaid (Sedan, Fra), Hoffer (Napoli, Ita), Korkmaz (Ingolstadt), Lehmann (Cologne), Schildenfeld (Dynamo Moscow, Rus)

Newly promoted Eintracht have been struggling to find a shirt sponsor this summer and staying in the elite could prove equally difficult. Journeymen

Goals...Idrissou

proliferate, although they do boast three of the best four goalscorers in last season's second division: Alex Meier, Mohamadou Idrissou and Olivier Occean.

FORTUNA DUSSELDORF

Coach
Norbert Meier
Key arrivals
Cha (Celtic, Sco), Giefer (Bayer Leverkusen), Rafael (Augsburg), Reisinger (Freiburg), Soares (Duisburg), Wegkamp (Osnabruck)
Key departures
Broker (Cologne), Lukimya (Werder Bremen), Rosler (Alemannia Aachen), Schwertfeger (Alemannia Aachen)

Back in the top flight for the first time in 15 years, Fortuna fans were euphoric after victory over Hertha Berlin in the play-offs, only for the feel-good factor to be subsequently soured by the loss of outstanding Congolese defender Assani Lukimya and talismanic attacker Sascha Rosler.

FREIBURG

Coach
Christian Streich
Key arrivals
Hedenstad (Stabaek, Nor), Kruse (St Pauli), Terrazzino (Karlsruher)
Key departures
Barth (Aalen), Hinkel (released), Lumb (Zenit, Rus), Reisinger (Fortuna Dusseldorf)

As pathetic in the first half of 2011-12 as they were outstanding in the new year under new coach Streich, the Black Forest side will stick to their tried-and-tested formula of graduates from their excellent academy and bargain basement buys.

GREUTHER FURTH

Coach
Mike Buskens
Key arrivals
Hesl (Dynamo Dresden),

Motivator...Buskens

Rahman (Asante Kotoko, Gha), Sobiech (Borussia Dortmund), Stieber (Mainz)
Key departures
Karaslavov (Botev Plovdiv, Bul), Occean (Eintracht Frankfurt), Schrock (Hoffenheim)

Although Bundesliga virgins, the men from Franconia are not the sort to be overawed or negative, a tribute to the motivational and team-building skills of boss Buskens. One snippet of bad news: the sale to Eintracht of their Canadian top scorer Olivier Occean.

HAMBURG

Coach
Thorsten Fink
Key arrivals
Adler (Bayer Leverkusen), Rudnevs (Lech Poznan, Pol)
Key departures
Bertram (Bochum), Guerrero (Corinthians, Bra), Jarolim (out of contract), Petric (Fulham, Eng)

In decline for the past four years and perilously close to demotion last season, Hamburg have two major problems: the uncanny knack of turning good players into lightweights and an allergy to pressure. Chairman Carl-Edgar Jarchow's optimistic talk of qualifying for Europe seems wishful thinking.

HANOVER

Coach
Mirko Slomka
Key arrivals
Felipe (Standard Liege, Blg), Nikci (Zurich, Swi), Sakai (Kashiwa Reysol, Jap)
Key departures
Lala (Bayern Munich), Pogatetz (Wolfsburg), Stoppelkamp (1860 Munich)

No team in Germany has overachieved as much in recent times as this well-drilled and opportunistic outfit, who finished fourth in 2010-11 and seventh last term. The next step for Slomka's side is to become more adept at taking the initiative.

HOFFENHEIM

Coach
Markus Babbel
Key arrivals
Delpierre (Stuttgart), Derdiyok (Leverkusen), Schrock (Greuther Furth) Usami (Gamba Osaka, Jap), Wiese (Bremen)
Key departures
Mlapa (Borussia M'gladbach), Musona (Augsburg), Raitala (Heerenveen, Hol), Sigurdsson (Tottenham Hotspur, Eng), Starke (Bayern Munich), Zuculini (released)

In a serious effort to bust out of the mid-table mediocrity of the past three seasons, the south-westerners have shown a great deal of ambition in the transfer market, notably in recruiting Germany's second-choice goalkeeper Tim Wiese and Swiss striker Eren Derdiyok. A priority

Signed on...Delpierre

for coach Babbel will be to instil higher fitness levels.

MAINZ

Coach
Thomas Tuchel
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Stieber (Greuther Furth), Zidan (released)

Their chronic inconsistency last season was largely due to recruiting 12 new players, and highly rated young coach Tuchel has now insisted on a much reduced and tighter squad. One player to watch out for is centre-back Jan Kirchhoff.

NUREMBERG

Coach
Dieter Hecking
Key arrivals
Antonio (Rapid Bucharest, Rom), Gebhart (Stuttgart), Kiyotake (Cerezo Osaka, Jap), Ngankam (Hertha

Lucky 13...Kiyotake

Berlin), Polter (Wolfsburg)
Key departures
Bunjaku (Kaiserslautern), Didavi (Stuttgart), Maroh (Cologne), Wollscheid (Bayer Leverkusen)

Once regarded as the identikit "elevator" club, Nuremberg have surprised many by comfortably preserving their elite status in the past two seasons. But with leading marksman Daniel Didavi returning to Stuttgart following a loan spell and classy defender Philipp Wollscheid heading for the exit, the signs are looking ominous.

SCHALKE

Coach
Huub Stevens
Key arrivals
Barnetta (Bayer Leverkusen), Neustadter (Borussia M'gladbach)
Key departures
Deac (CFR Cluj, Rom), Hoogland (Stuttgart), Kenia (Zenit, Rus), Kluge (Hertha Berlin), Raul (Al Sadd, Qat)

Spanish legend Raul has exited stage left, so the Royal Blues more than ever will need the goals of Dutch star Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, the Bundesliga leading scorer last season with 29. A downsized strike-force could spell trouble and a further worry is they simply do not have enough strengh in depth to fight both on domestic and Champions League fronts.

STUTTGART

Coach
Bruno Labbadia
Key arrivals
Hoogland (Schalke), Torun (Hertha Berlin)
Key departures
Boulahrouz (Sporting Lisbon,Por), Celozzi (E Frankfurt), Delpierre (Hoffenheim), Gebhart (Nuremberg), Schieber (Borussia Dortmund)

Even though the rebuilding of the Mercedes-Benz Arena and a lack of European competition cash has forced them to tighten their belts, optimism is in the air. The Swabians were one of the most impressive teams in the second half of last term, and in Martin Harnik and Vedad Ibisevic boast a voracious pair of strikers, while the academy continues to turn out talent.

WERDER BREMEN

Coach
Thomas Schaaf
Key arrivals
Elia (Juventus, Ita), Gebre Selassie (Slovan Liberec, CzR), Lukimya (Fortuna Dusseldorf), Petersen (Bayern Munich)

Stuttgart shirt...Hoogland

Key departures
Boenisch (released), Marin (Chelsea, Eng), Naldo (Wolfsburg), Pizarro (Bayern Munich), Rosenberg (out of contract), Silvestre (released), Thy (St Pauli), Wiese (Hoffenheim)

In his 13 years in charge, Schaaf has never faced a more daunting test, forced to virtually start from scratch following a mass exodus of class and dressing-room influence. Without top scorer Claudio Pizarro, creative force Marko Marin and keeper Tim Wiese, the outlook is bleak.

WOLFSBURG

Coach
Felix Magath
Key arrivals
Dost (Heerenveen, Hol), Naldo (Werder Bremen), Olic (Bayern Munich), Pannewitz (Rostock), Pilar (Hradec Kralove, Cze), Pogatetz (Hanover)
Key departures
Ben Khalifa (Grasshoppers, Swi), Chris (released), Lenz (retired), Mandzukic (Bayern Munich), Polter (Nuremberg), Salihamidzic (released), Sio (Augsburg)

Too often Magath's recruitment has involved more sound and fury than reason. But this summer he has applied more method, especially in regard to his forward line, where Bas Dost, Ivica Olic and Vaclav Pilar could function particularly well.

GREECE SUPER LEAGUE

Economic troubles see clubs shopping locally

Through thick and thin...Panathinaikos fans make their presence felt

The country's deep financial crisis has left Super League clubs' coffers empty, with hardly a summer arrival of note. In most cases clubs got rid of highly paid players in order to avoid defaulting on money owed. Gone are the days when shipping tycoons and business magnates dominated, pouring in endless funds to buy only the best players.

The best example of what is happening in the top flight at the moment can be seen at **Panathinaikos**.

The Athens club were on the verge of bankruptcy at the end of last season despite the team having won the play-off round to secure a place in the third qualifying round of the Champions League. In a bid to raise funds, former major shareholder Giannis Vardinogiannis put his 54.72 per cent stake up for sale, but found no takers.

Skai media group owner Yiannis Alafouzos then came up with the idea of creating Panathinaikos Alliance 2012, a fan group with the aim of acquiring the majority stake in the club. Any Panathinaikos fan could become a member by investing a minimum of €20, and acquiring a number of shares corresponding to the amount of money invested, but with only one vote in any decision-making procedure.

"All together, in the most important match for our team, we are taking Panathinaikos back into our hands," is the recruitment drive's motto, and the response has been very positive, with thousands lining up to become members.

The club's Portuguese coach, Jesualdo Ferreira, was the first symbolic donator of the alliance, giving €1,000 to the fund and signing a two-year extension to his contract.

"To stay at Panathinaikos is, for me, an act which I think demonstrates my great love for the club and proves my willingness to help in building a new project," says Ferreira. "As everybody undoubtedly understands, particularly in these difficult times that the club is experiencing, it is not money that is important. I know the risks and difficulties that I am undertaking but I want to stand by Panathinaikos."

Most of the players also did their bit to help out by agreeing to pay cuts of up to 40 per cent. As for new talent, Pana have added Ivory Coast winger Ibrahim Sissoko on loan from Wolfsburg and Portuguese defender Andre Pinto from Porto. Venezuelan defender Jose Manuel Velazquez has also arrived on loan from Villarreal, Senegalese midfielder Pape Habib Sow joins from Academica of Portugal and New Zealand forward Kosta Barbarouses is on loan from Alania Vladikavkaz.

Sebastian Leto, the Argentinian striker who scored 15 goals in 17 league games last season before he was injured, continues to be sidelined and will miss the first six months of the new campaign following knee surgery.

Missing from the squad this term will be national team midfielder Sotiris Ninis (who has joined Parma), Cleyton (Kayserispor), Cedric Kante (Sochaux), Simao (Shandong Luneng) and Damien Plessis (Arles).

Another club going through a major facelift are **AEK Athens**, who have a new coach in Vangelis Vlachos. Club legend Thomas Mavros has been appointed honorary president and, like city rivals Panathinaikos, AEK are also trying to get supporters to help the team financially.

However, reviving AEK is going to be a tough job as debt problems mean the club were not allowed to compete in European competition this season and have been banned from signing any new players, other than Greeks who are under the age of 22.

In order to help meet their pressing financial needs, AEK sold big names such as Viktor Klonaridis (to Lille), Grigoris Makos (Munich 1860), Kostas Manolas (Olympiakos), Jose Carlos (Rayo Vallecano), and Fabian Vargas (Independiente), while Eidur Gudjohnsen, Nikos Georgeas and Pantelis Kafes also left, and Nikos Liberopoulos and Traianos Dellas retired.

"We were forced to give away Klonaridis, who would have brought us much more money in the future," said Vlachos. "It is not good to sell players and the first person who suffers from this is the coach. But perhaps this sale of Klonaridis will save us temporarily – and AEK is above all of us."

One of the ideas to bring in cash is to offer 50,000 season tickets at a very attractive price of just €150, with the hopes of going beyond last year's sales figure of 15,000.

"All together we must make AEK a team that they would be afraid of, and not one that they feel sorry for," added Vlachos. "Our first goal is to have AEK regain its respect and its dignity."

Considering the money problems their biggest rivals are experiencing, the relatively wealthy defending champions **Olympiakos** are likely to continue their dominance of the Super League. The Piraeus club have added to their squad

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 25, 2012
Season ends
May 2013

Donation...Ferreira

this summer, bringing in Vasilios Karagounis (from Udinese), Andreas Gianniotis (Ethnikos Gazoros), Claude Dielna (Istres), Siovas and Panagiotis Vlachodimos (both Xanthi), and AEK's Manolas. Their main losses were Sweden defender Olof Mellberg, who left as a free agent, and national defender Avraam Papadopoulos, who was injured at Euro 2012 and will be out for the first half of the season at least.

Olympiakos also have a new coach in Venezuela's Leonardo Jardim, previously with Braga in Portugal and who has signed a two-year deal to replace the departing Ernesto Valverde.

Dusan Bajevic, who has won eight Greek titles as a coach, returned to take over **Atromitos** for the next two seasons, with the team preparing for Europa League action.

"The good thing about Atromitos is that it does not have financial problems like many clubs in Greece," says Bajevic. "The club is consistent with its obligations towards the players. Our goal is to advance to the group stage of the Europa League and get to the domestic league play-offs. The Greek Cup is also a chance for us to reach a higher level."

Bajevic's ambitions will be helped by the addition of Stathis Tavlaridis (OFI), Manolis Kallergis (Fokikos), Nikos Lazaridis (Aris) and Finnish striker Njazi Kuqi (Panionios).

Atromitos were led into Europe after a fine season under Giorgos Donis, who has since taken over from Laszlo Boloni at Europa League-bound **PAOK**.

Donis says his aim is to bring some joy to the fans of the financially stricken club, saying: "I represent a very big club. What I want to do is proceed step by step. A significant part is to set targets. We will have to stay on a high level and overcome the crisis."

He has added only South Africa defender Bongani Khumalo (from Tottenham Hotspur) while letting go of Bruno Cirillo (to Al Nasr) and Fotis Koutzavasilis (Panserraikos).

AEK's place in the Europa League was taken by **Asteras Tripolis** and their coach Sakis Tsiolis will have to embark on the club's first-ever European adventure without Juli, who has joined Rayo Vallecano, and Rogerio Martins, who went to Levadiakos. The club did, however, manage to bring in Ergotelis midfielder Michalis Fragoulakis.

Aris are another club with money woes who are looking to their fans to come and back them.

"The problems are one right after the other on top of our heads. We need people to come and support us in the stadium. Aris can only go forward with a stadium that is filled," appealed board member Stavros Lambriakos.

His remarks were echoed by Aris coach Makis Katsavakis who added: "Only a united Aris of supporters, players and administration can overcome the difficulties."

Aris will have virtually an all-Greek squad this season following the departure of foreign players Eldin Jakupovic (to Hull), Javier Umbides (Orduspor), Ronald Garcia (Oriente Petrolero), Nery Castillo (Pachuca), Nikos Lazaridis (Atromitos) and Ricardo Faty (Ajaccio). The Salonica-based side managed to add domestic players Dimitrios Aslanidis and Giannis Gesios (both from Epanomi) and Nikolaos Pantidos (Ethnikos).

Former international goalkeeper Dimitris Eleftheropoulos will also have to rely on Greek players as coach of **Panionios**. He has brought in Konstantinos Peristeridis (from Almere City), Christos Aravidis (Doxa Drama), Dionysios Giannoulis (Sylvia) and Vasilios Lambropoulos (Ethnikos), with Dimitrios Siovas and Njazi Kuqi leaving for Olympiakos and Atromitos respectively.

PAS Giannina had a nasty surprise in July when club president Giorgos Christovasilis was arrested over the €187,000 his club owe in state taxes. Their limited budget has meant they, too, have had to shop locally, signing Charis Kostakis (from Iraklis), Dimitrios Kolovetsios (Larissa), Evangelos Georgiou (Epanomi), Nikos Korovesis (Apollon), Theodoros Berios (Zenit Caslav), Apostolos Bakolas and Konstantinos Ganotis (both from Psachna), and Michalis Avgenikou (Diagoras).

Kerkyra have replaced Mario Galinovic (to Veria) and Dimitrios Grammozis (Bochum) with Dimitrios Diamantopoulos (from Fokikos), Anastasios Tsokanis (Psachna) and Andreas Vasilogiannis (Olympiakos).

OFI Crete picked up Giannis Vlachos (from Chersonisos), Alexandros Perogamvrakis and Anastasios Tzirakis (both from Rouvas), while among those let go were Jordi Lopez (to Goverla), Boldizsar Bodor (Beerschot), Efstathios Tavlaridis (Atromitos), Giorgios Giorgiou (Levadiakos) and Fotis Papoulis (Apollon Limassol).

Levadiakos also added Alexandros Kasmeridis (from Thrasyvoulos), Kristijan Miljevic (Brescia) and Panagiotis Tsintotas (Pierikos), while giving up Paschalis Melissas, Dimitrios Ioannou and Dimitrios Kaliaras (all to Paphos AEP), Mano (to Estoril) and Giannis Alexiou (Uerdingen).

Panthrakikos picked up Ilias Michalopoulos from Kallithea, **Veria** signed Carlinos and Guille (both from Gijon), and **Skoda Xanthi** signed Benjamin Onwuachi (from Panetolikos) and Panagiotis Triadis (Wehen Weisbaden) while parting company with Dimitrios Souanis (to Apollon Limassol) and Stephane Darbion (Troyes).

Lou Economopoulos

"To stay at Panathinaikos is, for me, an act which I think demonstrates my great love for the club and willingness to help build a new project"

Cup winners...Olympiakos skipper Vasilis Torosidis lifts the trophy

Joy...PAOK's Donis

GREEK LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

Olympiakos	39
Panathinaikos	20
AEK Athens	11
Aris	3
PAOK	2
Larissa	1

HOLLAND EREDIVISIE

PSV turn to prodigal sons Advocaat and Van Bommel

In a bid to clinch their first national title since 2008 – and, more importantly in financial terms, qualify for the Champions League after four consecutive years away – **PSV** have brought Dick Advocaat and Mark Van Bommel back to Eindhoven.

Advocaat was previously PSV coach from 1995 until 1998, winning the title in 1997 and the Dutch Cup a year earlier, and he returns after not renewing his contract to lead Russia's national side. Van Bommel won four national titles and a Dutch Cup with the club between 1999 and 2005, and he joins from Milan at the age of 35.

Last year PSV were everybody's favourites for the title after the local council rescued them from a perilous financial situation by buying the club's stadium and training ground for €50million. In return the club agreed to pay rent for the next 40 years. When sporting director Marcel Brands stood on the steps of Eindhoven city hall and announced to fans that Dries Martens and Kevin Strootman had been bought for €30m, the crowd chanted that the title was already theirs. Later, the arrival of Timothy Derijck, Przemyslaw Tyton, Georginio Wijnaldum and Tim Matavz only increased the expectation.

Until the winter break all went well, with PSV just behind leaders AZ, but the second half of the season proved disastrous. Coach Fred Rutten lost his grip and paid with his job. Caretaker boss Phillip Cocu steered the side to Dutch Cup Final success, but third place in the Eredivisie meant no Champions League football once again this season.

The experienced Advocaat has the task to deliver success, as he has done in the past, and Van Bommel will be key in his strategy. Having just retired from international football, he should be the team's motor, along with Strootman.

PSV strengthened their defence by signing Denmark's Matthias "Zanka" Jorgensen from Copenhagen and also acquired Heerenveen right-winger Luciano Narsingh. Striker Ola Toivonen's future is uncertain, however.

For once, **Ajax** enjoyed a quiet pre-season. The champions did lose skipper Jan Vertonghen to Tottenham Hotspur but that didn't come as a surprise. In fact, coach Frank De Boer was expecting national team right-back Gregory Van der Wiel to leave as well. De Boer now has the opportunity to build a team around youngsters from the club's academy, and Danish teenage striker Viktor Fischer and right-back Ricardo Van Rhijn look set to make the breakthrough.

Only NEC's Danish playmaker Lasse Schone has been signed so far, although Niklas Moisander of AZ is viewed as a serious contender to replace Vertonghen. De Boer also hopes he can convince defensive midfielder Vurnon Anita to sign a new contract instead of moving to Newcastle United.

A big relief was the departure of Mounir El Hamdaoui to Fiorentina. The striker, banished to the reserves after a dispute with De Boer, had previously refused to co-operate with a move to Italy, leaving Ajax saddled with paying a salary of €1.8m for an unused striker.

Like PSV, **Twente** are seeking rehabilitation and the Enschede club are title contenders once again after a miserable previous season. New signings Dusan Tadic (Groningen), Tim Breukers (Heracles), Andreas Bjelland (Nordsjaelland), Robbert Schilder (NAC) and Felipe Gutierrez (Universidad Catolica) have given Steve McClaren's squad an impressive boost. They have lost winger Ola John (Benfica) and striker Luuk De Jong (Borussia Monchengladbach), while defender Douglas is also likely to be on his way if chairman Joop Munsterman's asking price is met.

Twente are starting their season early, in the Europa League preliminary rounds and the big fear is that they could fizzle out in the decisive stages of a long campaign.

Last year's runners-up **Feyenoord** have lost key players such as midfielders Karim El Ahmadi (Aston Villa), Otman Bakkal (Dynamo Moscow) and, most notably, striker John Guidetti (returned

> Van Bommel, now retired from international football at the age of 35, will be key to Advocaat's strategy

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 10, 2012
Season ends
May 12, 2013

Return...Van Bommel (centre) will drive PSV

Ajax breakthrough...Van Rhijn (left)

SUMMER COACHING CHANGES

	OUT ▲	IN ▼
HEERENVEEN	Ron Jans	Marco Van Basten
RODA JC	Harm Van Veldhoven	Ruud Brood
RKC WAALWIJK	Ruud Brood	Erwin Koeman
PSV	Phillip Cocu (interim)	Dick Advocaat
GRONINGEN	Pieter Huistra	Robert Maaskant
VITESSE	John Van den Brom	Fred Rutten

to Manchester City after a loan). However, the arrival of Lex Immers (ADO Den Haag), Daryl Janmaat (Heerenveen), Ruud Vormer (Roda JC) and John Goossens (NEC), plus Norwegian pair Harmeet Singh (Valerenga) and Omar El Abdellaoui (Manchester City) means Ronald Koeman's squad looks strong again.

At **AZ**, much depends on whether playmaker Rasmus Elm and defender Moisander stay. They have already lost Brett Holman (Aston Villa), Simon Poulsen (free agent), Charlison Benschop (Brest) and Ragnar Klavan (Augsburg). Elm's brother, Viktor, from Heerenveen is the only decent new signing for a club that has struggled since the collapse of sponsors DSB.

Heerenveen coach Marco Van Basten will have to do without Bas Dost, who has moved to German club Wolfsburg, and PSV new boy Narsingh. The most notable signing is Ghanaian striker Matthew Amoah, who has had spells at Vitesse and NAC.

Much will again be expected from **Vitesse**. Georgian owner Merab Jordania is desperate for the Arnhem club to join the championship race and he will put pressure on ex-PSV coach Rutten, who took over this summer. Jordania is a close friend of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich, whose Champions League winners have already loaned them Patrick Van Aanholt. He may not be the only summer arrival from Stamford Bridge.

Groningen and **NEC** could be the surprise packets. Despite losing Tadic to Twente, Groningen's new coach Robert Maaskant, who won the Polish league with Wisla Krakow, has a good squad and new signings Mitchell Schet (RKC Waalwijk), Genero Zeefuik (PSV) and Michael De Leeuw (De Graafschap) will only add to that. NEC coach Alex Pastoor could benefit from new boys Evander Sno (RKC Waalwijk), Geert Arend Roorda and Michel Breuer (both Heerenveen).

ADO Den Haag, **RKC Waalwijk**, **Roda JC**, **Utrecht** and **VVV-Venlo**, could either finish with a Europa League ticket or face the drop. They are of roughly the same strength, cash is in short supply and they regularly lose their best players to the top five. **NAC Breda** have more serious financial problems and may struggle, as could neighbours **Willem II**, who came up via the play-offs.

Fellow newcomers **PEC Zwolle**, with former Manchester United defender Jaap Stam as assistant coach, will also do well to avoid the drop. Since returning to the top flight the club have reverted to their old name, having changed to FC Zwolle after going bankrupt in 1990. They will hope to take advantage of their artificial pitch – they and **Heracles** are the only clubs in the Eredivisie with such a surface.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Luciano Narsingh
Heerenveen to PSV

The 21-year-old winger was credited with 20 assists in the Eredivisie last season – more than any other player.

ITALY SERIE A

Lessons to be learned from Euro 2012

You did us proud...Italy coach Prandelli comforts defender Leonardo Bonucci after the Euro 2012 Final defeat by Spain

Italy is an old country, with old ideas and an old mentality. This is hardly a new thought, but when the man expressing that view is national coach Cesare Prandelli, people sit up and take notice.

In the wake of a Euro 2012 campaign that exceeded all expectations, there might be a temptation for some to think that all is well in the Italian garden. But Prandelli was keen to point out that serious problems remain, saying on the day after Italy's 4-0 defeat by Spain in the Final: "We have every reason to be proud of this team. We played good, clean football and did so without polemics.

"The team is based not just on tactical but also ethical considerations and it could be an example for our whole country which is old, has old ideas, an old mentality and doesn't want to change.

"And yet, football is an important vehicle [for change]. We have important potential and infrastructure, not to mention talented people."

On one level, Prandelli's words were primarily directed at purely football considerations; on another, they strike a telling chord in a country where youth unemployment (in the 16-24 age bracket) touched a record high of 32.4 per cent this summer.

On the football front, Prandelli's complaints were obvious enough. Essentially, he wanted to make two points. Firstly, little space is allocated to national-team training sessions. "How do you expect me to train the team if I get them together just three times in eight months?" he asked.

He went on to point out how this season's Italian Super Cup between Serie A champions Juventus and Italian Cup winners Napoli has been scheduled for August 12 in China, just three days before Italy are due to meet England in a prestige friendly in Switzerland. In other words, none of the players from either club will be available for the game in Berne.

Secondly, he wanted to decry those media polemics which had not only focused on the pre-Euro "Last Bet" scandal but which also "offended" him by accusing him of nepotism with the inclusion of his son, Niccolo, in his staff for the Euro 2012 finals. Niccolo, he claimed, is an accomplished physio who worked with him for three years at Fiorentina.

As for the football and that comprehensive defeat by Spain, Prandelli commented: "My only regret is we didn't have two more rest days before the Final. In a way, maybe I should have made wholesale changes and introduced [fresher] players. But that would have meant a total lack of respect for the players who had taken us to the Final."

Asked if the "potential" of Italian football meant that there were more like Andrea Pirlo in the pipeline, Prandelli was cautious. "Even though Andrea has the ability and desire to play on for another two years at this level, it is vital that we introduce new younger players," he explained. "However, if they are not playing in European competition, what do we do?"

Pirlo himself preferred to

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 25, 2012
Season ends
to be confirmed

concentrate his thoughts on the Final he had just lost, saying: "First of all, you've got to say that the best team won. Spain are perhaps the only team in the world who can outplay us in terms of pure football technique. But we were not in the [physical] condition to resist them as we did in the opening game in Gdansk.

"We had a great Euro run, all the way to the Final where we weren't good enough but also where we weren't lucky – just look at our injury problems, the fact that we played the last half-hour with 10 men or the chance that [Antonio] Di Natale missed just after half-time."

One irony of the Final concerned one of those injuries, namely to converted left-back Giorgio Chiellini. Clearly not at his best, Chiellini was beaten by Cesc Fabregas after only 15 minutes as the Barcelona man set up David Silva's brilliant opening goal.

It is tempting to ask what would have happened had Prandelli's original first choice left-back, Domenico Criscito, been available rather than having been dropped from the squad on the eve of the tournament because of a tangential involvement in the "Last Bet" scandal.

The scandal may well have focused Italian player minds but it arguably cost Prandelli dear.

Down to earth

Within days of Euro 2012, Italian football came down to earth with a bump when it emerged that Paris Saint-Germain were going to sign arguably the two most important players in the Milan squad: Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Brazilian defender Thiago Silva. Does this mean that all of Serie A's biggest names are now up for grabs?

That good run in this summer's European Championship simply cannot mask the fact that Italian football continues to lose power and influence, at least at club level. A few economic indicators make the point.

In 2005, Milan, helped by a good Champions League run, recorded seasonal earning of €234million, more than Barcelona who earned €207.9m in the same year. In 2011, Milan returned an almost identical turnover, at €235.1m while in the meantime Barcelona had more than doubled their earnings at €450.7m. Remember, too, that Forbes rate Milan as Italy's most valuable club, standing at sixth in their 2012 rankings, behind Manchester United, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Arsenal and Bayern Munich.

Put another way, where once Italian football was the second wealthiest league in the world it is now fifth in the rankings, behind not just the Premier League but also Germany, Spain and France. In other words, all-too-old Italian football continues to stand still as the others gallop.

All, however, is not lost; at least not yet. For a start, and this is clearly no bad thing, the more Italian football loses both its drawing power and expensive players, the more space there should be for home-grown talent. Could that be good news this year for players such as Mattia Destro of Siena, Milan's Stephan El Shaarawy, Marco Davide Faraoni of Udinese, Ciro Immobile of Genoa, Lorenzo Insigne of Napoli, Torino's Angelo Ogbonna and many others besides?

What Euro 2012 underlined emphatically is that despite all its manifold problems – betting scandals, heavily indebted clubs, antiquated stadia, racist and/or violent fan behaviour – Italian football, as stressed by Prandelli, retains a quality of outstanding excellence that owes everything to the national, symbiotic link to the beautiful game. There is still plenty of very interesting Italian talent around.

The more Italian football loses its drawing power, the more space there should be for home-grown talent

As for change, well that is obviously a difficult call in this current climate of austerity and euro crisis. There are many clubs – Lazio, Roma and Fiorentina being the most obvious ones – which, given the successful example established by Juventus, would like to embark on a stadium-building project but which may have to put those plans on further hold.

One intriguing item of change and renewal that is happening concerns the legendary Meazza stadium at San Siro, Milan. For 20 years now, ever since the stadium was renovated for the 1990 World Cup, the San Siro pitch has given nothing but problems, with the grass seemingly unable to grow because the sun had been shut out by the extra "storey" which was added for 1990.

In recent years, Milan and Internazionale, the two clubs that lease the stadium from Milan town council, have solved the problem by relaying the entire pitch, often four times per season at a cost of £400,000 per year. This remedy has not always produced an ideal playing surface. After the Milan-Barcelona Champions League quarter-final last spring, Barcelona's Brazilian full-back Dani Alves memorably called the San Siro pitch a "potato patch". And that was not the first such comment by a less-than-impressed visitor.

For the forthcoming season the two clubs have opted to install a synthetic pitch, comprising 70 per cent natural grass and 30 per cent plastic. Dutch company Desso, who were responsible for the laying of the new pitches at Wembley and the Emirates Stadium, are in charge of the installation. The first chance to assess their work will come in early August, when Inter are due to play a Europa League home game.

Paddy Agnew

SUMMER COACHING CHANGES

	OUT ▲	IN ▼
PALERMO	Bortolo Mutti	Giuseppe Sannino
FIORENTINA	Vincenzo Guerini (caretaker)	Vincenzo Montella
ROMA	Luis Enrique	Zdenek Zeman
LAZIO	Edy Reja	Vladimir Petkovic
PESCARA	Zdenek Zeman	Giovanni Stroppa
CATANIA	Vincenzo Montella	Rolando Maran
SIENA	Giuseppe Sannino	Serse Cosmi
SAMPDORIA	Giuseppe Iachini	Ciro Ferrara

Great expectations... Torino's Ogbonna

Pitch battle...Milan's Ignazio Abate goes flying in the derby against Inter

2012-13 SERIE A SIDES

Seasons in the top flight

80	Internazionale
79	Juventus, Roma
78	Milan
74	Fiorentina
69	Lazio
68	Torino
66	Bologna, Napoli
63	Sampdoria
51	Atalanta
45	Genoa
39	Udinese
33	Cagliari
25	Palermo
21	Parma
15	Catania
10	Chievo
8	Siena
5	Pescara

ITALY SERIE A Team by team

ATALANTA

Coach
Stefano Colantuono
Key arrivals
Brivio (Lecce), Cazzola (Juve Stabia), Denis (Udinese)
Key departures
Basha (Torino)

Did well to stay up last season despite a six-point penalty for match-fixing involvement. There could, however, be more of that on the way...

BOLOGNA

Coach
Stefano Pioli
Key arrivals
Acquafresca (Genoa), Finocchio (Parma), Pasquato (Udinese)
Key departures
Di Vaio (Montreal Impact, Can), Gillet (Torino)

Attack...Diamanti

Marco Di Vaio may have left but they still have two interesting attacking options in Alessandro Diamanti and Gaston Ramirez.

CAGLIARI

Coach
Massimo Ficcadenti
Key arrivals
Dossena (Sampdoria), Eriksson (Gothenburg, Swe), Pinilla (Palermo), Ribeiro (Rentistas), Rossettini (Siena)
Key departures
Canini (Genoa)

Will struggle to stay up after finishing 15th on 43 points last season.

CATANIA

Coach
Rolando Maran
Key arrivals
Antenucci (Torino), Frison (Vicenza), Morimoto (Novara)
Key departures
Lopez (Sampdoria)

Vincenzo Montella, who worked miracles last season when they finished 11th, has moved on to Fiorentina. His replacement Maran will have his work cut out.

CHIEVO

Coach
Domenico Di Carlo
Key arrivals Cofie (Genoa), Di Michele (Lecce), Papp (Vaslui, Rom), Stoian (Roma)
Key departures
Acerbi (Milan), Bradley (Roma)

Did well last season to finish 10. With Davide Di Michele set to lead the line they could do well again.

FIORENTINA

Coach
Vincenzo Montella
Key arrivals
Cassani (Palermo), El Hamdaoui (Ajax, Hol), Hegazy (Ismaily, Egy), Lupatelli (Genoa), Roncaglia (Boca Juniors, Arg)
Key departures
Behrami (Napoli), Gamberini (Napoli), Montolivo (Milan)

There was bitter disappointment last season when they finished 13th, but much is expected of new boss Montella this year. Stevan Jovetic, Mounir El Hamdaoui and Alessio Cerci could form an interesting attack.

Hit man...Jovetic is part of a revamped Fiorentina strike force

GENOA

Coach
Luigi De Canio
Key arrivals
Anselmo (Palmeiras, Bra), Canini (Cagliari), Immobile (Juventus), Polo (Universitario, Per), Rosado (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Tozser (Genk, Blg)
Key departures
Acquafresca (Bologna), Cofie (Chievo), Constant (Milan), Lupatelli (Fiorentina), Palacio (Internazionale)

Just avoided the drop last year and may well repeat that showing this year.

INTERNAZIONALE

Coach
Andrea Stramaccioni
Key arrivals
Handanovic (Udinese), Palacio (Genoa), Silvestre (Palermo)

On a mission...Internazionale's new striker Palacio

Key departures
Lucio (Juventus)

Out of the Champions League for the first time in 10 years, Inter and Stramaccioni are on a mission of rehabilitation.

JUVENTUS

Coach
Antonio Conte
Key arrivals
Asamoah (Udinese), Giovinco (Parma), Isla (Udinese), Leali (Brescia), Lucio (Internazionale), Pogba (Manchester United, Eng)
Key departures
Immobile (Genoa)

The defending champions, having strengthened the squad with players such as Ghanaian Kwadwo Asamoah and Mauricio Isla (both Udinese), Lucio (Internazionale) and Sebastian Giovinco (Parma), are the obvious league favourites. It will be much harder this season – if only because they are involved in the Champions League this time around.

Joining champions...Lucio

LAZIO

Coach
Vladimir Petkovic
Key arrivals
Candreva (Udinese), Ederson (Lyon), Zarate (Internazionale)
Key departures
None

Back at Lazio...Zarate

Lazio missed out narrowly on the Champions League last season, finishing fourth. Much hope will be pinned on returning Argentinian striker Mauro Zarate and Brazilian new boy Ederson.

Important...Palermo will rely on Miccoli's goals

MILAN

Coach
Massimiliano Allegri
Key arrivals
Acerbi (Chievo), Constant (Genoa), Montolivo (Fiorentina), Traore (Nancy)
Key departures
Gattuso (Sion, Swi), Ibrahimovic (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra), Seedorf (Botafogo, Bra), Silva (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra), Van Bommel (PSV, Hol)

With Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Thiago Silva gone, the worry is that this Milan may lack competitive bite.

NAPOLI

Coach
Walter Mazzarri
Key arrivals
Behrami (Fiorentina), Gamberini (Fiorentina)
Key departures
Lavezzi (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra)

Argentinian ace Ezequiel Lavezzi has been wooed by the PSG sirens but Napoli still look a handy unit – one which could even make a title challenge.

PALERMO

Coach
Giuseppe Sannino
Key arrivals
Brienza (Siena), Morganella (Novara), Ujkani (Novara)
Key departures
Cassani (Fiorentina), Finocchio (Bologna), Pinilla (Cagliari), Silvestre (Internazionale)

A similar squad to last season, with Fabrizio Miccoli and Uruguay's Abel Hernandez in attack. Should avoid the drop more comfortably this year.

New in Parma...Ninis

PARMA

Coach
Roberto Donadoni
Key arrivals
Amauri (Juventus), Belfodil (Lyon, Fra), Ninis (Panathinaikos, Gre), Pabon (Atletico Nacional, Col)
Key departures
Giovinco (Juventus)

Played some good football while finishing eighth last term but will miss Giovinco.

PESCARA

Coach
Giovanni Stroppa
Key arrivals
Bjarnason (Standard Liege, Blg), Caprari (Roma)
Key departures
Verratti (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra)

Without promotion-winning coach Zdenek Zeman, replaced by Serie A debutant Stroppa, a hard season looks likely.

ROMA

Coach
Zdenek Zeman
Key arrivals
Bradley (Chievo), Lucca (Internacional, Bra)
Key departures
Stoian (Chievo)

All eyes are on Zeman as the "whistleblower" finally makes it back to the top of Italian football, 12 years after he first accused Juventus of systematic doping practices. Michael Bradley, David Pizarro, Daniele De Rossi and old man Francesco Totti are on hand to help out.

SAMPDORIA

Coach
Ciro Ferrara
Key arrivals
Costa (Reggina) Eder (Cesena), Lopez (Catania)
Key departures
Dossena (Cagliari)

Buoyed by the enthusiasm of promotion from Serie B, with key new boys in coach Ferrara and Argentinian striker Maxi Lopez, Sampdoria will be expected to stay up.

SIENA

Coach
Serse Cosmi
Key arrivals
Rubin (Torino), Valiani (Parma)

Wanted...Destro

Key departures
Brienza (Palermo), Gazzi (Torino), Rossettini (Cagliari), Ujkani (Palermo)

Match-fixing enquiry developments may yet complicate Siena's season as will the anticipated departure of star striker, 21-year-old Mattia Destro.

TORINO

Coach
Giampiero Ventura
Key arrivals
Basha (Atalanta), Gillet (Bologna), Gazzi (Siena)
Key departures
Antenucci (Catania), Rubin (Siena)

Just staying up will do very nicely as they stay in the shadows of illustrious neighbours Juve.

UDINESE

Coach
Francesco Guidolin
Key arrivals
Allan (Vasco da Gama, Bra), Heurtaux (Caen, Fra), Maicosuel (Botafogo, Bra), Pasquato (Bologna), Pawlowski (Lechia Gdansk, Pol)
Key departures
Asamoah (Juventus), Denis (Atalanta), Floro Flores (Grenada, Spa), Handanovic (Internazionale), Isla (Juventus)

Despite their good football last season, Udinese may again struggle in Europe, all the more so since they have offloaded some very decent players.

In charge...Zeman lays down the law on his return as Roma coach after 12 years

POLAND EKSTRAKLASA

Even the country's biggest clubs are for sale

Cold comfort...all is not well in Wroclaw despite their contribution to the hosting of Euro 2012

After all the euphoria over the positive reaction to the country's joint organisation of this summer's Euros had died down, the bleak realism of the domestic competition's financial problems were back in the headlines.

With profits hard to come by in the long term, serious investors are no longer willing to get involved. As Polish newspaper *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* crushingly observed: "It is impossible for the clubs to balance their costs only on football incomes."

According to informed speculation, last season's champions Slask Wroclaw, third-placed Legia Warsaw, Lech Poznan, Korona Kielce, Gornik Zabrze and Lechia Gdansk are among those clubs that are up for sale.

Slask Wroclaw's majority shareholder Zygmunt Solorz-Zak, who owns *Polsat TV* and the *Polkomtel* mobile network, said he wanted the club to "bring no more losses" when he decided to invest his money three years ago. Now he "does not want to give any more to cover new debts". Saddled with huge debts and an unstable financial situation, it will be very difficult for Slask to retain their title.

After spending around £15million and sacking 18 coaches since 2006, Polonia Warsaw's owner – the eccentric billionaire building contractor Jozef Wojciechowski – finally decided to withdraw his interest from football. In July, in a controversial move, he "sold" Polonia's place in this season's Ekstraklasa, together with its players, to second-tier **GKS Katowice**, who planned to form a new club, KP Katowice. But GKS fans protested at the idea and relegated **Cracovia Krakow** may now keep their place in the top flight. At time of going to press, nothing was decided.

> Saddled with huge debts and an unstable situation, it will be very difficult for Slask to retain the title

For many clubs, terminating the contracts of their highest-paid players is one way of trying to reduce costs. For example, **Widzew Lodz** let Jaroslaw Bieniuk, a rock of their defence and a natural team leader, move to Lechia Gdansk. They plan to replace experienced players with young talent, while **GKS Belchatow** have told their entire squad to look for new clubs.

Jaroslaw Mroczek, chairman of **Pogon Szczecin**, decided to write an open letter to local "friendly politicians" asking them for help "to balance the club budget and keep the financial fluency", while the other promoted club last season, **Piast Gliwice**, exist only thanks to the support of their city council, which built a new stadium and provides the £2.35m which makes up the majority of this year's budget.

With so little cash around, the summer transfer window was naturally very quiet. The one positive aspect, however, is that at long last young Polish players are now in demand rather than foreign mercenaries.

As for the title, **Legia Warsaw** are sure to give a good account of themselves under the returning Jan Urban. Last season's runners-up **Ruch Chorzow** could also have a say in matters, despite losing coach Waldemar Fornalik to the national team. He is replaced by his brother and former assistant, Tomasz, and thanks to the sponsorship of Weglokoks – the largest exporter of hard coal in Europe – they are one of the few clubs without financial problems.

Lech Poznan's promising young coach Mariusz Rumak lost Latvian forward Artjoms Rudnevs to Hamburg during the summer, but he brought in Hungarian striker Gergo Lovrencsics from Papa as a replacement.

Champions in 2011, **Wisla Krakow** were disappointing last term and lost several important players during the close season. Experienced centre-back Arkadiusz Glowacki has returned from Trabzonspor and he should guarantee more stability in the defence.

Mid-table would seem the best hope for **Korona Kielce**, **Jagiellonia Bialystok**, **Lechia Gdansk**, **Zaglebie Lubin** and **Gornik Zabrze**, while **Podbeskidzie Bielko-Biala**'s second season in the top flight could be an extremely difficult one.

Dariusz Kurowski

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 17, 2012

Mid-season break
December 8, 2012 to February 21, 2013

Season ends
May 31, 2013

Contender...Rafal Wolski (centre) of Legia Warsaw

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Marko Suler
Hapoel Tel Aviv to Legia Warsaw

The 29-year-old Slovenia defender was one of the few interesting new arrivals in the Ekstraklasa.

Dominant Porto aim to make it seven out of eight

Future perfect...Porto expect Iturbe (left) and Rodriguez to come to the fore

Whether **Porto** can maintain the vice-like stranglehold they have on the domestic championship - six titles in seven seasons - will depend on how successful they are in keeping their stars on board.

Brazilian striker Hulk, midfield general Joao Moutinho and central defender Rolando have all been linked with big-money moves, and if the trio did leave the damage would be severe. As expected, Colombian midfielder Fredy Guarin made his loan move to Internazionale permanent, while arriving are two highly-regarded youngsters: Brazilian keeper Fabiano, bought from Olhanense, and Colombian front runner Jackson Martinez, who was snapped up for £7million from Mexicans Jaguares. With memories of compatriot Radamel Falcao's goalscoring exploits still vivid, the latter will, rightly or wrongly, be judged by those exacting criteria.

Porto also hope this will be the season when two gifted youngsters, Colombian winger James Rodriguez and Argentina's Juan Manuel Iturbe, make their mark.

Having to play second-fiddle to Porto is a thorn in the flesh of Lisbon powerhouse **Benfica**, and although theoretically their squad is the equal of their northern rival's, they do not have the same belief, killer instinct and powers of endurance. Which is a shame because they do have the raw material in the perfectionist ways of coach Jorge Jesus; the goal threat of Oscar Cardozo, Nolito, Bruno Cesar and young Nelson Oliveira; the playmaking skills of Nicolas Gaitan; and the physical force in defence of skipper Luisao and Ezequiel Garay. Chief among the new faces is Dutch winger Ola John who arrives from Twente.

For all the passion and loyalty of **Sporting Lisbon** coach Ricardo Sa Pinto and his potentially sound recruitment drive – bringing in Croat wing-back Danijel Pranjic from Bayern Munich, Swiss defensive midfielder Gelson Fernandes from Saint-Etienne and Moroccan attacking midfielder Zakaria Labyad from PSV – club president Luis Godinho Lopes was indulging in wishful thinking when he recently announced his side would be "fighting for first place". The buzz at last season's Europa League semi-finalists is that revered Brazilian striker Liedson could return for a second spell in green-and-white hoops.

> Benfica do not have the belief, killer instinct and powers of endurance of their northern rivals

The epitome of high-ranking consistency with three top-four finishes in as many years, **Braga** have a new figure at the helm as former Real Madrid assistant Jose Peseiro takes over from Leonardo Jardim. One of Peseiro's main problems is that his squad is too big. With the necessary pruning proving somewhat difficult, additions to the ranks have been thin on the ground – the main one being the arrival from Romanian champions Cluj of keeper Beto, who will do battle with the experienced Quim for the starting spot. The key men continue to be prolific goalgetter Lima, backed up by Hugo Viana and with Custodio in midfield.

In a country ravaged by economic crisis, a sustained challenge to the hegemony of the big four clubs is unlikely. However, on Madeira both **Maritimo** and **Nacional** have a predilection for rebellion and punching above their weight. Despite losing top scorer Edgar to the petro-dollars on offer in the Gulf, **Vitoria Guimaraes** still have enough solidity and enterprise to stay in the top six. **Academica** will also have been buoyed by their domestic Cup Final victory over Sporting Lisbon last spring - their first trophy in 73 years - and the bright ideas of coach Pedro Emanuel. Down in the Algarve, **Olhanense** seem on the rise too, cleverly led by former Portugal winger Sergio Conceicao.

For the rest, survival is the name of the game. **Pacos de Ferreira** look short on firepower now leading striker Paraguayan Lorenzo Melgarejo has returned to Benfica following a spell on loan. **Gil Vicente**, **Vitoria Setubal**, **Beira-Mar** and **Rio Ave** have all the limitations expected of shoestring clubs, as do promoted **Estoril** and **Moreirense**. Estoril are banking on one last hurrah from ex-Benfica, Porto, Atletico Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain midfield starlet Hugo Leal, while in only their fourth season of top-flight football Moreirense will be looking to new Brazilian striker Pedro Beda for salvation.

Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 18, 2012
Season ends
May 19, 2013

Winger...John

Stalwart...Custodio

PORTUGUESE LEAGUE TITLES

Benfica	32
Porto	26
Sporting Lisbon	18
Belenenses	1
Boavista	1

ROMANIA LIGA 1

Bucharest clubs seeking capital returns

Rivalry...CFR Cluj's Modou Sougou (left) challenges Florin Gardos of Steaua Bucharest

It has been five long and frustrating seasons since a club from the capital Bucharest last won the Romainian title. However, over the past few years, Unirea Urziceni, Otelul Galati, CFR Cluj and Vaslui have all helped to make the country's top flight a lot more attractive, with five or six clubs in with a real chance of getting their hands on a trophy that used to go regularly to either Steaua and Dinamo.

Last year **CFR Cluj** were one of the least impressive title winners in recent times, playing so poorly in the second half of the season that former Porto coach Jorge Costa was replaced with Ioan Andone – after which they managed to play even worse.

The irony is that Andone was sacked in 2008 after winning the league and was therefore denied the chance to lead the team in the Champions League group stage. Now he is getting another shot at reaching the group phase, despite having very little to do with actually getting the team into the toughest competition of them all.

With a few decent, but unspectacular additions to the squad, CFR will rely on the goalscoring touch of former Steaua striker Pantelis Kapetanos, who travelled to the 2010 World Cup with Greece. But, realistically, they are unlikely to make an impact in Europe and could have a hard time defending their title.

Last term's runners-up **Vaslui** have always managed to better their previous season's performance under ambitious owner Adrian Porumboiu. They have done some good deals this summer and managed to keep hold of Wesley, who was the league's top scorer with 24 goals last time out, but the surprise departure of coach Augusto Inacio could unsettle the team.

The side remains strong up front, but the departure of Paul Papp and Pavol Farkas to Italy's Chievo leaves them weak at the back and there are doubts that Inacio's replacement, Marius Sumudica, will be able to hold things together and make the impulsive Porumboiu happy over a long period.

> Andone will have his shot at the Champions League despite having little to do with CFR Cluj getting there

The same goes for **Steaua Bucharest** boss Laurentiu Reghecampf, who worked wonders with Concordia Chiajna in the second half of last term. Steaua owner Gigi Becali has changed his coach 16 times in five years, so Reghecampf – who co-stars in a reality TV show alongside his wife Ana-Maria Prodan – won't want to drop too many points in the first part of the season... unless he wants to devote more time to a career in television. His chances will have been improved by the fact he has clung on to 22-year-old centre-back Vlad Chiriches, who was linked with Milan during the summer.

Despite winning the Romanian Cup last season, **Dinamo Bucharest** coach Dario Bonetti is not exactly safe either. He lacks the support of the fans, has to work under a board formed by members who are in a constant struggle for power, and he is by no means a favourite of the extremely influential agents Victor and Ioan "Giovani" Becali. Dinamo lost central defender Cosmin Moti, who joined Ludogorets Raz, and he could be followed out of the door by Marius Niculae. **Rapid Bucharest** must overcome the loss of defender Marcos Antonio to Nuremberg, midfielder Dan Alexa to Anorthosis Famagusta and striker Ciprian Deac to CFR Cluj, but they have retained goalscoring midfielder Ovidiu Herea for another year.

With their impressive support in a brand new stadium, plus a dozen new players and a title-winning coach in Mircea Rednic, **Petrolul Ploiesti** could be this season's surprise package. The division's most exciting newcomer is **Viitorul Constanta**, the club built from scratch by the legendary Gheorghe Hagi, while **Otelul Galati**, **Gaz Metan Medias** and **Pandurii** should all have safe, quiet seasons.

There will be a tough battle at the bottom, with promoted clubs **Turnu Severin**, **CSMS Iasi** and **Gloria Bistrita** expected to struggle, just like **Universitatea Cluj**, who finished sixth last season but have lost their wealthy owner and most of their best players to Petrolul. **Brasov**, **Ceahlaul**, **Concordia Chiajna** and **Astra Ploiesti** could also struggle, with the latter giving Bogdan Stelea his first job as a coach.

Radu Baicu

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 20, 2012

Mid-season break
December 15, 2012 to February 28, 2013

Season ends
May 31, 2013

Staying put...Herea

Surprise...Rednic

ROMANIAN LIGA 1

	WINNERS	RUNNERS-UP
2007	Dinamo Bucharest	Steaua Bucharest
2008	CFR Cluj	Steaua Bucharest
2009	Unirea Urziceni	Timisoara
2010	CFR Cluj	Unirea Urziceni
2011	Otelul Galati	Timisoara
2012	CFR Cluj	Vaslui

League kicks off with new calendar but old problems

Expectant...CSKA hope Dzagoev (second left) will bring his Euro 2012 form to the new season

The first Russian league season to be played over the regular autumn-spring format kicked off amid pessimistic debate over the country's football future.

Russia surprisingly failed to reach the Euro 2012 quarter-finals, prompting the resignation of football federation president Sergei Fursenko, who stepped down on his return from Warsaw after a brief conversation with state president Vladimir Putin.

Although Fursenko's plan for a quick transition to the new European calendar – replacing the old spring-autumn season – was criticised by many, there is no way back, at least for this season.

Club owners took advantage of the power vacuum to change the rule limiting the number of foreigners in the league, raising the number of non-Russians allowed on the pitch at any given time from six to seven. The move was initiated by nouveau-riche club Anzhi Makhachkala, whose owner-oligarch Suleiman Kerimov spent more than £125million on player purchases last season and is planning to spend twice as much this campaign.

The change angered sports minister Vitaliy Mutko, who said it would be detrimental to young domestic talent.

One of those youngsters, and Russia's only Euro 2012 success, was Alan Dzagoev, who will lead **CSKA Moscow** in the new campaign. The team had a disastrous finish last spring, ending up third and out of the Champions League, with manager Leonid Slutskiy lucky not to be fired. Gremio's Mario Fernandes became CSKA's first pre-season signing, with the 21-year-old Brazilian reportedly costing £12m, and he is expected to boost an ageing back line featuring Sergei Ignashevich and the Berezutsky brothers, Aleksei and Vasili.

Champions **Zenit** started the new season with a 2-0 defeat by Cup-holders Rubin Kazan in the Super Cup. Zenit's Italian coach Luciano Spalletti had been a candidate to replace Dick Advocaat as Russia's national boss, but the club's owners, Gazprom, refused to let him go. Meanwhile, 31-year-old Andrei Arshavin, on loan from Arsenal last season, returned to England. The future of the national-team captain, who was mocked by the media and fans after Euro 2012, is uncertain.

> Nouveau-riche Anzhi initiated changing the rule limiting the number of foreigners in the league

By mid-summer Zenit's only signings were Schalke's Georgian midfielder Levan Kenia and Montenegro youth-team striker Luka Djordjevic.

Second-placed **Spartak Moscow** were one of two top clubs to change coach this summer. Spanish newcomer Unai Emery produced a wish-list that included 34-year-old midfielder David Albelda, who played more than 330 games for Emery's previous club Valencia.

Lokomotiv Moscow hired former Croatia boss Slaven Bilic and he brought with him experienced international Vedran Corluka, the ex-Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur defender who was loaned to Bayer Leverkusen last January. **Moscow Dynamo** have let Alexander Samedov, the winger who failed to make the Euro squad despite his good form last season, return to Lokomotiv for a second spell.

Lokomotiv, owned by Russian Railways, finished seventh last season, not only behind Zenit and the three other Moscow clubs, but also **Anzhi Makhachkala** and **Rubin Kazan** – who sweetened their sixth place with victory in the Cup Final.

Anzhi made it into the top five for the first time and will play in the Europa League this season. However, their debut will be marred by UEFA's decision to move international games away from the city for security reasons. So far the club have bought only Lacina Traore from Kuban Krasnodar but the 21-year-old Ivorian will add fire power up front where Samuel Eto'o has often been left isolated.

Krasnodar's two teams are preparing for a second season in the top flight. **Kuban**, coached by Romania's Dan Petrescu, managed to get a top-eight spot, while **Krasnodar** finished at the head of the 9-16 group. The participants had been split into two halves at the end of the transitional championship and will now reunite to play the regular 16-team league.

The other clubs are **Terek**, from the troubled city of Grozny, **Amkar Perm**, Samara's **Kryliya Sovetov**, **Rostov** and **Volga**. Experienced Montenegrin coach Miodrag Bozovic signed a contract with Rostov, while one of the country's oldest and most respected football experts Gadzhi Gadziev, who is now 66, will be at the helm of Volga.

Alania Vladikavkaz return to the elite under the presidency of 1995 league-winning coach Valeri Gazzaev, and are joined by **Mordoviya Saransk**.

Victor Gusev

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 20, 2012

Mid-season break
December 13, 2012 to March 8, 2013

Season ends
May 18, 2013

Loko man...Bilic

Gone...Arshavin

SUMMER COACHING CHANGES

	OUT ▲	IN ▼
LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW	Jose Couceiro	Slaven Bilic
VOLGA	Dmitri Cheryshev	Gadzhi Gadzhiev
SPARTAK MOSCOW	Valery Karpin	Unai Emery
AMKAR PERM	Miodrag Bozovic	Rustem Khuzin
ROSTOV	Anatoly Baidachny	Miodrag Bozovic

SCOTLAND PREMIER LEAGUE

Historic season for Scottish football

Friday the 13th, July 2012, will go down in history as the fateful date that cemented the misfortunes of Rangers, but also as one which may redefine the future map of Scottish football.

Having finally gone into liquidation as a result of their financial meltdown, and having had their Scottish Premier League (SPL) status rescinded in July, the Ibrox club will start life again this season as a new entity in the Third Division, Scotland's fourth tier.

Initial hopes that "Rangers Newco" might receive a lighter punishment and drop just one level, to the First Division, were thwarted by the clubs of the Scottish Football League (SFL) who make up the three lower tiers.

The upshot is that, for the first time since 1890, when the championship began, the Scottish league calendar will be denied its flagship fixture, the Old Firm derby. Instead, Rangers will face trips to the likes of Peterhead, Annan Athletic and Elgin, clubs that normally attract home crowds of a few hundred. For a club that has won its national championship on a world record 54 occasions and which, just four years ago, reached the Final of the UEFA Cup, this is a scenario few could ever have imagined possible.

However, the Rangers saga could provide the catalyst for fundamental change in the Scottish game, which has been in long-term decline in terms of its development, quality, attendances and revenue streams.

Plans initiated by Henry McLeish, the former Scottish First Minister, to undertake a wholesale restructuring of the league system 18 months ago, are now back on the agenda, with serious consideration being given to an integrated league infrastructure that would see the SPL and SFL clubs brought under a single umbrella.

Ibrox hot seat...new owner Green

This season, the "new" Rangers will venture into unchartered waters, with manager Ally McCoist relying on a bare-bones squad that is virtually unrecognisable from the one that completed the 2011-12 season. The failure of new owner Charles Green to officially seek the consent of the players before transferring their registrations from the old Rangers to the new company was seen by some of the players as a breach of their contracts. They claimed "free agent" status, with plenty of predators lining up to take full advantage, subject to FIFA approval.

If Rangers have to embark on their attempt to rise from the depths with a team made up largely of youth players fast-tracked into senior duty, their ascendance back up the leagues is by no means a foregone conclusion. Pitching youngsters, groomed on the manicured turf at Rangers' salubrious Murray Park training complex, into the rough and tumble of lower-league football against seasoned pros on cut-up pitches is no guaranteed formula for progress.

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 4, 2012
Season ends
May 19, 2013

> The Rangers saga could provide the catalyst for fundamental change in the Scottish game

Critics of the level of punishment meted out to Rangers suggest that the potential loss of TV revenue caused by an extended absence from the top flight could have severe consequences for Scottish football at large. However, their purgatory should at least have positive consequences for those at the bottom of Scottish football's pecking order, with sell-out stadiums wherever the fallen giants play.

Even worse

As if life were not bad enough already for Rangers, things could get even worse on August 10 when the SPL is due to issue a final decision on whether the club was guilty of "dual contracts" to pay players – effectively a means of false accounting – during the trophy-laden first decade of the 21st Century, under previous owner David Murray.

The SPL and SFA are understood to have considered the possibility of stripping the club of any silverware won during that period, following the precedent established in Italy back in 2006, when Juventus had two Serie A titles retrospectively rescinded as punishment for match-fixing. In Rangers' case, that would mean five league titles (2002-03, 2004-05, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11) and four Scottish Cups (2002, 2003, 2008 and 2009) being scratched from the record books.

Anger...Rangers fans protest

As things stand, there also remains the possibility that the one-year transfer embargo imposed by the SFA, and subsequently overturned by Scotland's Court of Session, could be reinstated, if the August 10 ruling goes against Rangers – who could be ordered to pay any football debts owed by the "old Rangers" to clubs in Scotland and Europe.

Meanwhile, the main immediate beneficiaries of Rangers' demotion from the SPL are **Dundee**, who have inherited their place in the top flight by dint of finishing as runners-up in the First Division last term, dashing the

hopes of relegated Dunfermline, who had also hoped to receive the vacant slot. Joining them will be First Division champions **Ross County**, who are making their debut in the Scottish top flight.

The other winners are, of course, **Celtic**, who won the title last season with ease after Rangers were deducted 10 points for entering administration.

For a club who have been quoted at 1/33 to win the league by some bookmakers, it seems strange that manager Neil Lennon's only early summer signing was a goalkeeper, with Newcastle United's Fraser Forster making his loan permanent. But with a 44th Scottish league title all but theirs even before the season starts, success for Lennon's side will be judged solely on their exploits in Europe.

"It would be nice to get into the Champions League group stage but I'm under no illusion how difficult that's going to be," says Lennon. "Everyone wants to play at the big table and that's our whole focus. We go into this as champions and that is a fantastic feeling, so hopefully that will give the players an extra spring in their step."

With Rangers' disqualified from Europe, third-place **Motherwell** took their place in this season's Champions League and they will play Panathinaikos in the third qualifying round. There will, however, be only one Champions League place allocated next season, so everyone else bar Celtic will be fighting for Europa League places this time.

After an absence of 13 years, **St Johnstone** were back in European competition this season and they will doubtlessly want more of the same, as do **Hearts**, who replaced Scottish Cup-winning manager Paulo Sergio with John McGlynn, and **Dundee United**.

As for **Aberdeen** and **Kilmarnock**, their priority is to make the top-six group when the league splits in half. **Hibernian**, **Inverness Caledonian Thistle** and **St Mirren** may struggle.

Dan Brennan

Homely...Balmoor

Permanent...goalkeeper Forster

SCOTTISH DIVISION THREE 2012-13

CLUB	GROUND	CAPACITY
Annan Athletic	Galabank	3,500
Berwick Rangers	Shielfield Park	4,131
Clyde	Broadwood Stadium	8,029
East Stirlingshire	Ochilview Park	3,776
Elgin City	Borough Briggs	3,927
Montrose	Links Park	3,292
Rangers	Ibrox Stadium	51,082
Peterhead	Balmoor	4,000
Queen's Park	Hampden Park	52,025
Stirling Albion	Forthbank Stadium	3,808

SERBIA SUPERLIGA

Partizan remain the team to beat

Big Belgrade derby...Partizan's Markovic (right) shields the ball from Red Star's Filip Mladenovic

As usual, there will only be two serious contenders for the league this season: holders Partizan and their Belgrade neighbours Red Star.

Partizan, who last season won the title for a record fifth time in a row, look to have a squad strong enough to pursue their ambition of winning the domestic double and qualifying for the Champions League group stage.

After Avram Grant's short spell in charge last spring, Vladimir Vermezovic has taken over as coach. It will be the former defender's second spell in charge, having guided the club into the UEFA Cup last 16 in 2005 – the only time since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia that a Serbian club has reached a European knock-out stage.

Another change has been the appointment as sports director of Ljubisa Tumbakovic, the most successful coach in Partizan's history with six league titles.

Although holding midfielder Mohammed "Medo" Kamara from Sierra Leone looks set to leave, Vermezovic can count on a practically unchanged squad. Veteran playmaker Sasa Ilic proved in pre-season warm-up games that he is still a vital player, while Stefan Babovic, normally an attacking midfielder, looked comfortable in his new position as one of the two holding midfielders. Lazar Markovic, Nikola Aksentijevic, Nikola Ninkovic and Aleksandar Mitrovic from the club's youth academy could also establish themselves at the top level.

Despite failing to win the title last season, **Red Star** coach Robert Prosinecki has again promised his side will end the season as champions. Whether his optimism is justified remains to be seen, but one local journalist has compared his prediction to Del Boy's famous comment to younger brother Rodney in the TV series *Only Fools and Horses*: "This time next year we'll be millionaires."

> Veteran playmaker Sasa Ilic showed in pre-season warm-up games that he is still a vital player for Partizan

For the time being, Red Star, who are still in financial difficulty, have not reinforced their squad, despite the loss of central defender Dusko Tosic and Colombian striker Cristian Borja. Coming in are Montenegro international Milan Jovanovic, from Spartak Nalchik, and striker Eli Babalj, an Australian with Serbian roots from Melbourne Heart. Whether they will be adequate replacements remains to be seen.

The good news for Prosinecki is that he has a young, hungry team, with a number of promising players coming through. The team always receive great support at the Belgrade Marakana and if the fans can continue to display such faith and enthusiasm it would be a big boost for this young side.

Vojvodina have had aspirations to break the domination of the big two in previous seasons, but it now seems that third place is a more realistic aim. Ghana midfielder Stephen Appiah's contract was not extended, but otherwise the squad remains much the same as last time. They have also signed three quality defenders in Igor Djuric, who was a member of the national squad under former Serbia coach Radomir Antic, experienced Djordje Jokic, formerly of OFK Belgrade and Torpedo Moscow, and Dutch right-back Serginho Greene from Levski Sofia.

OFK Belgrade, **Rad**, **Jagodina**, **Radnicki 1923** and **Sloboda** should be challenging for the Europa League places, while mid-table finishes are expected of **Smederevo**, **Spartak**, **Javor**, and **Novi Pazar**, who after a shaky start survived last season having bought their place in the top flight when promoted BASK decided to pull out.

BSK Borca, **Hajduk Kula** and the two promoted clubs, **Radnicki Nis** and **Donji Srem**, will most likely have to fight against relegation.

Most Serbian fans are happy to see Radnicki Nis back in the top tier after a long absence. From a big, traditional footballing city, Radnicki reached the UEFA Cup semi-finals in 1982, eliminating Napoli, Grasshoppers, Feyenoord and Dundee United before going out to Hamburg. Today, of course, they are light years away from such an achievement. But those glory days are on their CV and promotion last term is regarded as the first signs that Radnicki's gloomy days belong to the past.

Vladimir Novak

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 10, 2012
Season ends
May 25, 2013

Promises...Prosinecki

SUMMER COACHING CHANGES

	OUT ▲	IN ▼
PARTIZAN	Avram Grant	Vladimir Vermezovic
OFK BELGRADE	Branko Babic	Stevica Kuzmanovski
HAJDUK KULA	Tomislav Sivic	Velicko Kaplanovic
BSK BORCA	Velicko Kaplanovic	Goran Milojevic
JAVOR	Aleksandar Janjic	Mladen Dodic
SMEDEREVO	Dragan Dordevic	Aleksandar Janjic

NEW SEASON IN EUROPE

AUSTRIA: BUNDESLIGA

Defending champions make a chaotic start

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 21, 2012

Winter break
December 15, 2012 to February 14, 2013

Season ends
May 25, 2013

Salzburg's preparations began in chaos when Dutch coach Ricardo Moniz, who led them to a domestic double last term, quit two days into pre-season training and Brazilian winger Leonardo departed after publicly criticising team-mate Stefan Maierhofer.

Although he had one year of his contract still to run, Moniz – whose relationship with club owner Didi Mateschitz had been poor – walked out after a row over training methods.

His assistant Piet Hamberg briefly took charge before Roger Schmidt, who led Paderborn to fifth place in the German second division last term, was brought in, with former Schalke coach Ralf Rangnick hired as sports manager with the final say over transfers. This marked a return to the game for Rangnick, who quit Schalke last season due to exhaustion and was replaced, as coincidence would have it, by former Salzburg coach Huub Stevens.

Rangnick's first act was to kick out Leonardo, who had been given a second chance after previous indiscipline but blew it with his attack on Maierhofer, who scored 14 goals last season.

"We have a great squad but he is the exception," said Leonardo, who joined Feyenoord as a teenager and has never played in his homeland. "He just puts on a show. He must be happy to play with us as we all make him look better."

The new managerial double act face a tall order as they attempt to follow last season's success, but their main aim will be to get Salzburg into the Champions League group stage – something the team has failed to do since Red Bull took over in 2005, saying they would become one of the biggest in Europe.

Salzburg have fallen at the final hurdle of Champions League qualifiers four times, chiefly because they rebuilt extensively in the close season, often with expensive players, and entered the qualifiers with a team effectively untested. This time, however, there has been a change of emphasis with no major signings. Instead, four youngsters have been promoted from the club's junior side, who play in the third tier of the Austrian league.

Rangnick's first act was to kick out Leonardo, who had publicly criticised team-mate Stefan Maierhofer

Salzburg's main challengers for the domestic title are likely to be **Rapid Vienna**, who have also decided to put youth first. Rapid, who won the last of their record-breaking 32 titles in 2008, will be playing their second season under coach Peter Schottel, having finished runners-up last time out.

Like most teams in the league, Rapid are under pressure to cut costs. "The squad has to become cheaper because a lot of older players with good salaries have left," says Schottel. "I don't want expensive, risky transfers.

"I don't believe in signing big-name players at the end of their careers. We prefer to make our own stars because it is through them that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Of Rapid's squad of 25 who began pre-season training, 13 were aged 23 and under. "It is a conscious decision to sign young players or promote them from the amateur team," adds Schottel. "This has proved the right thing to do. The boys have earned our trust."

He will be hoping that more can follow the example of Lukas Grozurek, who began last season struggling for a place in the youth team and ended it as a regular for the senior side, even scoring the goal that took Rapid into the Europa League.

Four of the other eight teams will start the championship under new coaches. Peter Stöger has taken over at **Austria Vienna**, promising a more attacking outlook than predecessor Ivica Vastic. Last season Stöger did well to keep **Wiener Neustadt** up after sponsors Magna departed and his successor, Heimo Pfeifenberger, formerly with second tier Grödig, is set for a battle to avoid the drop, along with **Mattersburg** and **Wacker Innsbruck**.

Ried, Cup finalists last season, made Heinz Fuchsbichler their coach, while Peter Hyballa will lead 2011 champions **Sturm Graz**, who faded badly last term.

Promoted **Wolfsberger**, in the top flight for the first time, can only dream of matching **Admira**, who qualified for this season's Europa League after gaining promotion the previous year.

Brian Homewood

RECENT CHAMPIONS

2002	Tirol Innsbruck
2003	Austria Vienna
2004	Graz
2005	Rapid Vienna
2006	Austria Vienna
2007	Salzburg
2008	Rapid Vienna
2009	Salzburg
2010	Salzburg
2011	Sturm Graz
2012	Salzburg

New boys...Salzburg coach Schmidt (left) greets sports manager Rangnick

Role model...Rapid's Grozurek (right)

Blue...Admira are in this season's Europa League

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SPAIN LA LIGA

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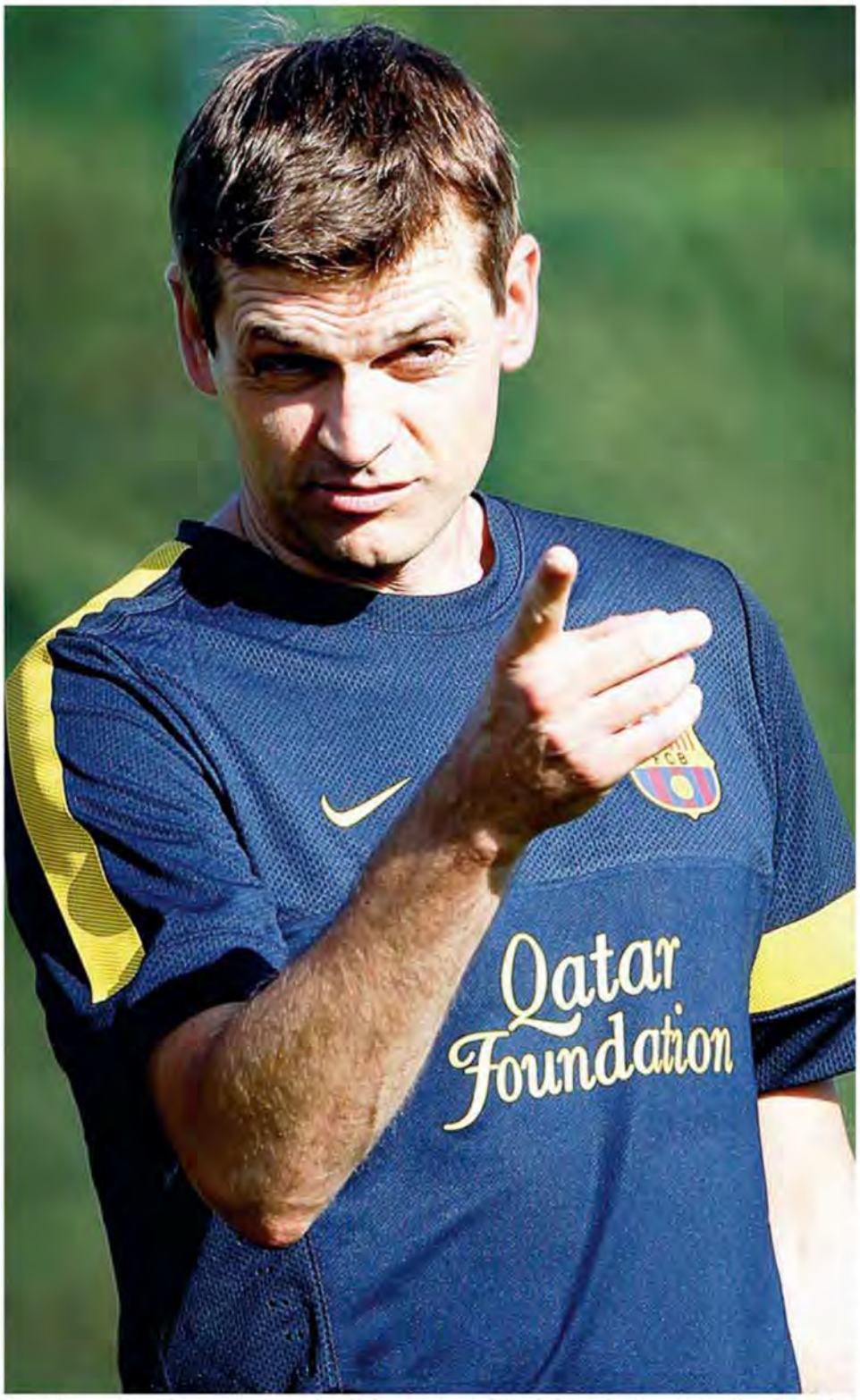

Sorcerer's apprentice...Vilanova has taken over from his former boss Guardiola, who is Barcelona's most succesful coach of all time

There was no Andres Iniesta, no Xavi and no Gerard Pique. There was no Pedro, Sergio Busquets or Cesc Fabregas. And, most importantly of all, there was no Pep Guardiola.

Leo Messi was there, though. And so was Tito Vilanova. On July 17, a new era began as Vilanova took his first training session as Barcelona's coach. After five years as Guardiola's assistant, one at Barcelona B and four in the first team, now he had to go it alone.

"The first day is a bit strange," said Vilanova. "We were together for five years, so it is an odd sensation. But we will have to get used to it because that's the way it's going to be all year."

Guardiola had gone after three league titles, two European Cups and two Club World Cups made him the most successful coach in Barcelona's history. More than a coach, he was the perfect embodiment of the club, the man who more than anyone else came to represent Barca. But burnt out and in need of a rest he walked away.

Living up to Guardiola will be impossible for Vilanova; living up to Guardiola would have been impossible even for Guardiola. But in opting for his assistant, Barcelona believe they have secured continuity. Writing in the sports daily *AS*, Santi Gimenez likened the transition to Liverpool's "boot room": if Guardiola was Shankly, Vilanova was Paisley. The pathway had been laid out.

Declaration of belief

Barcelona's swift handling of the situation seemed to be perfectly handled at first, at least from an emotional point of view. Vilanova's arrival was announced simultaneously to Guardiola's decision to walk away. What could have been a day of pessimism and concern was repackaged as a day of optimism; a kind of reaffirmation of their identity, a declaration of belief in a project, an ideal.

And yet soon there appeared to be a risk of it all unravelling. There were suggestions that Guardiola had not been entirely happy with the way that it was done and Vilanova did not sign his contract immediately. Opposition figures re-emerged and there was public criticism. President Sandro Rosell continued to look uncomfortable in his role, still seeking an identity, and it was hard to avoid the sensation that his

Centre stage...Lionel Messi (right) goes passed Alexis Sanchis on Barcelona's first day back in training. Players involved in Spain's Euro 2012-winning squad were given extra time off

Still together...Mourinho (left) and Higuain

support of the new coach might not be as whole-hearted as he had tried to make it look. The voice of Joan Laporta, Barca's former president, was heard.

Vilanova has always been a committed defender of the same footballing philosophy as Guardiola, perhaps even a more virulent one than the man he used to work with. Interviews with him while he was a number two show a man utterly convinced by Barcelona's approach. Although he had largely kept his council following Jose Mourinho's arrival in Madrid, he had been critical of the Portuguese coach when he was at Internazionale. Now, on his first day as coach, he adopted a conciliatory tone.

If Vilanova was already known for anything it was for being the man who Mourinho poked in the eye in last year's Spanish Super Cup. This year's game will bring the men together again in August. Although they had been banned for this year's competition - Mourinho for two games, Vilanova for one - the federation president Angel Maria Villar issued a pardon. "I accept that," Vilanova said.

Players talk about Vilanova as a man who is meticulous in his preparation; dedicated and disciplined. The assumption is that there will be a continuity about Camp Nou. But in stepping into a different role, with greater responsibility and far greater pressure, he is stepping into the unknown. One thing he does know is that the team to beat will be Real Madrid - and not just in the Super Cup.

Mourinho is beginning his third season at Madrid. No coach had lasted as long since Vicente del Bosque and at last they have stability. They also have largely the same squad as last season, after Gonzalo Higuain was persuaded to stay. They will be joined by new signings, with Luca Modric, Madrid's first priority. As for Barcelona, they moved to sign Jordi Alba three days before the Final of Euro 2012. He returns to the club he first joined as a 13-year-old.

Alba's signing, at a time of stagnation on the Spanish summer market, reinforced that dominance of the big two in Spain. Valencia had four World Cup winners, but ended up having to sell them all. They managed to get another player into the Spain squad and Alba was a revelation at Euro 2012. But by the time he scored against Italy, he was a Barcelona player. Of the starting XI against Italy, only one does not play for Madrid or Barcelona - Manchester City's David Silva. They will be the two teams fighting it out for the title once again. Vilanova knows that.

Sid Lowe

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 18, 2012
Season ends
May 31, 2013

The perfect embodiment of the club, Guardiola was the man who more than anyone came to represent Barca

SPAIN LA LIGA Team by team

Welcome...Aduriz has joined Bilbao from Valencia

ATHLETIC BILBAO

Coach
Marcelo Bielsa
Key arrivals
Aduriz (Valencia)
Key departures
Ocio (retired)

This has been a tumultuous summer in Bilbao, with Bielsa apparently on the verge of quitting after admitting that he had hit the man overseeing works at the club's Lezama training ground and having his criticisms of the construction company disowned by the board, who referred to him pointedly as an "employee". Bielsa stays. For now.

ATLETICO MADRID

Coach
Diego Simeone
Key arrivals
Diaz (Getafe), Emre (Fenerbahce, Tur), Rodriguez (Porto, Por),
Key departures
Dominguez (Borussia M'gladbach, Ger), Lopez (Mallorca), Perez (Betis),

As if Simeone was not enough of a hero already, he led Atletico to within a whisker of Champions League qualification and their second Europa League in three seasons. He is still battling to get Diego to return to the club after he went back to Wolfsburg following a successful season on loan. The good news is that top scorer Radamel Falcao could be set to stay - which many fans had doubted.

BARCELONA

Coach
Tito Vilanova
Key arrivals
Alba (Valencia)
Key departures
Keita (Dalian Aerbin, Chn), Mino (Mallorca)

Back at Barca...Alba

David Villa's return from injury gives Barca a boost and the arrival of Jordi Alba will give them projection on the left. Lionel Messi is the key, of course, and he is talking about removing the thorn from his side after last season's failure to claim either La Liga or the Champions League.

BETIS

Coach
Pepe Mel
Key arrivals
Agra (Olhanense, Por), Campbell (Arsenal), Paulao (Saint-Etienne, Fra) Perez (Atletico Madrid)
Key departures
Iriney (Granada), Montero (Morelia, Mex)

Last season Mel said he would rather his teenage daughter fell pregnant than see Betis go down. Luckily, neither happened. Under pressure for much of the season, Betis nonetheless played some of the neatest football in the league. Jefferson Montero has departed, as has Iriney, who played such a key role in the middle of midfield, but the approach will remain the same.

CELTA VIGO

Coach
Paco Herrera
Key arrivals
Cabral (Arsenal Sarandi, Arg), Llorca (Hercules), Varas (Sevilla)
Key departures
None

Celta are back under the management of the former Liverpool assistant Herrera, who left Anfield to cut his teeth as sporting director at Espanyol, and then as coach at Villarreal B and Castellon, before joining Celta. This has been a relatively stable summer so far, with Javi Varas joining from Sevilla. Celta scored more goals last season than at any time in their history.

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA

Coach
Jose Luis Oltra
Key arrivals
Evaldo (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Pizzi (Braga, Por), Rodriguez (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Salomao (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Santos (Sporting Lisbon, Por)
Key departures
Colotto (Espanyol), Guardado (Valencia)

Back in the top division after a year away, the 1999 league champions have leant heavily on their connections with Sporting Lisbon, via agent Jorge Mendes. Four players have arrived on loan from the Portuguese side as Depor seek to ensure that they stay in the First Division.

ESPANYOL

Coach
Mauricio Pochettino
Key arrivals
Colotto (Deportivo), Mubarak (Villarreal), Tejera (Mallorca),
Key departures
Marquez (Mallorca)

Alvaro Vazquez has formally denounced Espanyol for not paying his salary last season, as the financial crisis that forced the club to turn to outside investors to get through last season continues to grip. Pochettino is still around though, even though the coach appeared to be on his way. His ability to get the best out of players will be vital.

GETAFE

Coach
Luis Garcia
Key arrivals
Abraham (Basle, Swi), Arizmendi (Mallorca), Lafita (Zaragoza), Moya (Valencia)
Key departures
Diaz (Atletico), Rios (Levante)

Garcia quietly took Getafe on the third-best run in the division mid-way through last season and although they had a late collapse that he admitted he simply could not understand, there is optimism at the Coliseum. What there might not be, despite promises to the contrary, is much money.

GRANADA

Coach
Juan Antonio Anquela
Key arrivals
Angulo (Atletico Baleares), Floro Flores (Udinese, Ita), Iriney (Betis), Ortiz (Rangers, Sco), Torje (Udinese, Ita)
Key departures
Martins (Benfica, Por)

It will be fascinating to see how Granada fare under new coach Anquela - the man who sprang to fame when he led his impressive Alcorcon team to a Spanish Cup victory over Real Madrid and almost took

New arrival...Angulo

them to promotion to the first division too. As usual, there has been a huge turnaround at a club that's backed by the Pozzo family, owners of Udinese.

LEVANTE

Coach
Juan Ignacio Martinez
Key arrivals
Kone (Sevilla), Michel (Valencia), Rios (Getafe), Rodriguez (Elche)

Home...Marquez acquaints himself with Mallorca's dressing room

Key departures
Del Horno (released), Venta (Villarreal)

Levante, last year's revelation, have so far spent just 200,000 euros in the summer transfer market. That, though, is quite a lot for the miracle working team that had spent only 400,000 in the previous four years combined. Looking forward to a historic first ever season in Europe and, as usual, JIM and his players, are taking it all in their stride.

MALAGA

Coach
Manuel Pellegrini
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Van Nistelrooy (retired)

The club everyone expects to be Spain's third force, with huge investment and big-name players set to arrive as they prepare for a first Champions League campaign. But the dream appears to be under threat. Four players denounced Malaga to their union for non-payment of salaries. Could it be sales not arrivals that marks their summer?

MALLORCA

Coach
Joaquin Caparros
Key arrivals
Arizmendi (Getafe), Lopez (Atletico), Marquez (Espanyol), Mino (Barcelona)
Key departures
Castro (Sociedad), Tejera (Espanyol)

Caparros was persuaded to remain at Mallorca after doing a superb job last season and he believes that he now has the best squad in Spain. That's not true of course, but there is a true sense of stability and unity about the club at last. Optimism reigns.

OSASUNA

Coach
Jose Luis Mendilibar
Key arrivals
Armenteros (Sevilla), Arribas (Rayo Vallecano), Nano (Numancia), Sisi (Valladolid)
Key departures
None

Mendilibar's side were on the verge of European qualification last season and there is faith in the coach, who is described by his president as the perfect match for the club. Raul Garcia's return to Atletico Madrid following a successful loan spell is a huge blow, though.

RAYO VALLECANO

Coach
Paco Jemez
Key arrivals
Carlos (AEK Athens, Gre), Gonzalez (Racing Santander), Nielsen (Villarreal)
Key departures
Arribas (Osasuna), Michu (Swansea, Wal)

Last season Rayo avoided relegation with a last-minute goal on the final day of the season. Jose Ramon Sandoval, the coach, has since gone and so has their best player, with Michu moving to the Premier League. There have been eight other departures too. Difficult days probably lie ahead.

REAL MADRID

Coach
Jose Mourinho
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Altintop (Galatasaray, Tur)

Year Three for Jose Mourinho. Madrid's objective this season is a 10th European Cup. Luca Modric is set to arrive, with a right-back and an attacking player also on the agenda. A team with few apparent weaknesses.

REAL SOCIEDAD

Coach
Philippe Montanier
Key arrivals
Castro (Mallorca), Vela (Arsenal, Eng)
Key departures
None

Sociedad got the player they really wanted when Carlos Vela joined them on a permanent deal from Arsenal, after a superb season on loan. Montanier was often criticised often last term, but ultimately his team survived with something to spare and he

Belief in youth...Montanier

is a coach with a growing reputation for bringing youth through. That will be the test this time.

SEVILLA

Coach
Michel
Key arrivals
Hervas (Cordoba) Lopez (Villarreal), Maduro (Valencia), Rabello (Colo Colo, Chl)
Key departures
Armenteros (Osasuna), Kanoute (Beijing Guoan, Chn), Kone (Levante), Varas (Celta Vigo)

Fredi Kanoute departed for China as arguably the finest signing in Sevilla's history. The most significant arrival so far has been the signing of goalkeeper Diego Lopez from relegated Villarreal.

VALENCIA

Coach
Mauricio Pellegrino
Key arrivals
Guardado (Deportivo La Coruna), Pereira (Sporting Lisbon, Por), Viera (Las Palmas)
Key departures
Aduriz (Athletic), Alba (Barcelona), Maduro (Sevilla), Michel (Levante), Moya (Getafe)

Another summer must mean another rebuilding project at Valencia – but this time under a new coach. Under Unai Emery, who has departed for Spartak Moscow, even successive third-place finishes were not enough to truly win over players, fans or president. Will it be enough for Pellegrino?

REAL VALLADOLID

Coach
Miroslav Dukic
Key arrivals
None
Key departures
Sisi (Osasuna)

Valladolid are back in the first division under coach Djukic, having won the play-offs after a third-placed finish, beating Cordoba and Alcorcon. Yet to make any signings.

ZARAGOZA

Coach
Manolo Jimenez
Key arrivals
Gonzalez (Racing Santander), Loovens (Celtic, Sco), Montanes (Alcorcon), Wilchez (Colo Colo, Chl), Zuculini (Hoffenheim, Ger),
Key departures
Lafita (Getafe)

Jimenez continues as club coach after an historic escape last season, with no team having ever made up as much ground to stay in the top flight. In administration and suffering an economic crisis, it has been a summer of upheaval once more, with loan players leaving and loaned-out players returning.

Rebuilding...Guardado

SWITZERLAND SUPER LEAGUE

South American feel for Swiss top flight

Generation game...Sion's Gattuso (left) takes the ball from Ben Khalifa of Grasshoppers

Switzerland bears a strange resemblance to a Latin American country when it comes to domestic football – and not just because of the chaos which engulfed the Super League last season. Clubs perpetually operate on a shoestring budget, stadiums are rarely more than half full and many fans are more interested in what is going on in the Premier League or the Bundesliga than their own backyard.

As in Latin America, the top local players tend only to play at home when they are very young and still developing, or when they return for a swansong after a spell abroad. If a Swiss is playing at home when he is 25 it means he either isn't good enough to play abroad or has tried and failed. There is also a fourth category, consisting of foreign players invariably hoping they can use the Swiss top flight as a stepping stone to a bigger league.

Another similarity is that any period of success invariably results in a team being broken up and sold. **Basle** have now reached that point after winning the title for three seasons in a row, with two Swiss Cups and a place in the last 16 of the Champions League thrown in for good measure.

The core of last season's side has been shattered. In a move that is worrying for Swiss football, given that he will have to dislodge either Arjen Robben or Franck Ribery to get into the team, winger Xherdan Shaqiri has gone to Bayern Munich. Meanwhile, Granit Xhaka, the gifted teenage midfielder, has left for Borussia Monchengladbach, Argentinian central defender David Abraham has joined Getafe in La Liga and defensive midfielder Benjamin Huggel has retired at the age of 34.

In many ways Basle are an example of how a club should be run. They develop their own talent, treat their fans with respect and are prudent in the transfer market – but even they could find the transition difficult this season.

> Any period of success results in a team being broken up and sold off. Basle have now reached that point

They have made three foreign signings: Marcelo Diaz from Universidad de Chile, Gaston Sauro from Boca Juniors and Mohamed Salah from Arab Contractors, at a total cost of around £8million. Sauro is a surprise signing, having played only a couple of games last season. The others are more interesting, as Salah is regarded as one of Egypt's most exciting talents and Diaz, 25, was a key figure in a hugely impressive Universidad team.

Whether the same could be said of Gennaro Gattuso remains to be seen. The former Milan hard man, whose career was endangered by an eye problem last season, has joined **Sion** – which, if nothing else, shows that he has questionable taste given that the club made themselves and Swiss football a laughing stock last season by dragging UEFA into a legal quagmire.

Lucerne, runners-up in both the league and cup last season, will try to go one better, although coach Murat Yakin has promised they will attempt to play more attacking football following criticism that they were dull to watch.

Another team familiar with second place are **Young Boys Berne**, who reached the European Cup semi-final back in 1959. Runners-up three seasons in a row from 2008 until 2010, they last won the league title in 1986. The appointment of former Tottenham Hotspur and Stuttgart boss Christian Gross proved no solution and he was fired before the end of last season as the club eventually finished third. His replacement is Martin Rueda, who will be hoping he can hang on to Emmanuel Mayuka, one of the heroes of Zambia's African Nations Cup triumph in February.

Zurich's sporting director Fredy Bickel has predicted "a difficult season ahead of us", while their neighbours **Grasshoppers** will offer Nassim Ben Khalifa the chance to start again. Voted the best player when Switzerland won the World Under-17 Championship in 2009, he was a Grasshoppers regular at the time. Since then he has been to Wolfsburg, who promptly dispatched him to the reserves and the fourth tier of German football, then Nuremburg and finally Young Boys.

Thun, who finished just outside the European places last term, will hope for a bit more luck this time out, as will **Servette**, whose new owner Hugh Quennes rescued them from bankruptcy.

Sport-Lausanne came out of the second tier two seasons ago and would have returned last term if Sion had not been docked 36 points and Neuchatel Xamax kicked out of the league.

St Gallen, the country's oldest club and who narrowly staved off bankruptcy themselves less than two years ago, are this campaign's promoted side.

Brian Homewood

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 13, 2012

Mid-season break
December 2, 2012 to February 7, 2013

Season ends
June 1, 2013

Attacking...Yakin

In demand...Mayuka

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Marcelo Diaz
Universidad de Chile to Basle

It's unusual for Swiss football to bag a top South American player so the midfielder's signing is a coup.

Galatasaray seek flair and firepower

Class act...Selcuk

Despite last season's triumph, not everyone was full of praise for championship winners **Galatasaray**. Much of the credit for their success can be put down to coach Fatih Terim's team-building flair, the steadiness of Uruguayan keeper Fernando Muslera, the box-to-box class of Selcuk Inan and the craft of Sweden's Johan Elmander up front. But where, asked the critics, is the individual quality and flair?

Terim has tried to address this during the summer with the addition of Real Madrid's immensely versatile Hamit Altintop and Cameroon centre-back Dany Nounkeu from Gaziantepspor. His big signing, however, was Trabzonspor goal-machine Burak Yilmaz, who topped the Super Lig scoring charts with 33 last term – more than twice as many as anyone else.

Interestingly, Terim has also taken a gamble on down-on-his-luck striker Umut Bulut, who following a big-money move from Trabzonspor to Toulouse failed to convince in Ligue 1.

Second place in the league and victory in the Turkish Cup last time out satisfied few **Fenerbahce** followers after a season dominated by a match-fixing scandal that saw the club banned from the Champions League.

Notable additions include Dirk Kuyt from Liverpool, Valencia's defensive midfielder Mehmet Topal, Kayserispor left-back Hasan Ali Kaldirim and national team centre-half Egemen Korkmaz, who after running down his contract with Besiktas headed across town on a free.

Brazilian skipper Alex remains a tremendous playmaker but at the age of 34, he cannot go on for ever and Fener coach Aykut Kocaman may have to use him in shorter bursts.

Over on the Black Sea, the ability of **Trabzonspor** to remain in the upper echelons of the league without goalscorer extraordinaire Burak will be severely put to the test. Coach Senol Gunes has started the rebuilding process, bringing in Leicester City centre-back Sol Bamba and the midfielder Soner Aydogdu from Genclerbirligi. A deal is also in place to sign Copenhagen's Senegalese front man Dame N'Doye.

> Burak Yilmaz topped the scoring charts with 33 goals – more than twice as many as anyone else

These are harsh times at elite Istanbul club **Besiktas**. Not only have they been banned from European competition for a year because of financial irregularities, their huge debt – said to total upwards of £150million – has forced them into a painful age of cut-price acquisitions and the use of academy graduates. A transitional period beckons and much will be riding on their latest crop of recruits such as Julien Escude from Sevilla, former Arsenal reserve midfielder Oguzhan Ozyakup and wing-back Olcay Sahan from Kaiserslautern.

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 18, 2012
Season ends
May 18, 2013

Ambitious...Cuper

Among those clubs with ambitions to mix it with the best, Black Sea outfit **Orduspor**, who are coached by ex-Valencia and Internazionale boss Hector Cuper, have made a clutch of impressive buys, bringing in Romanian striker Bogdan Stancu from Galatasaray, Brazilian central defender Roversio from Osasuna and Spanish striker David Barral from Gijon. Also looking upwards are **Kayserispor** – now led by the former Georgia forward Shota Arveladze – the ever-resilient **Eskisehirspor**, **Istanbul BB** and **Sivasspor**, who are coached by former Turkey winger Riza Calimbay.

Fenerbahce recruit...Kuyt

Riddled with money troubles, **Bursaspor** face an uncertain future, as do Ankara side **Genclerbirligi** who have simply lost too many key players of late. **Gaziantepspor**, **Karabukspor**, **Mersin** and **Antalyaspor** will be happy to keep their first division status and the same goes for the three promoted sides: second division champions **Akhisarspor**, runners-up **Elazigspor** and play-off victors **Kasimpasa**.

Eight years out of the elite, Elazigspor might be the best equipped of all the inductees, having brought in former France full-back Julien Faubert from West Ham and Herve Tum, the Cameroon striker with Champions League experience at Basle.

Nick Bidwell

TURKISH LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

Fenerbahce	18
Galatasaray	18
Besiktas	13
Trabzonspor	6
Bursaspor	1

UKRAINE PREMIER LEAGUE

Dynamo spend big in title quest

High flier...Dynamo defender Yevhen Khacheridi (centre) gets in a header against Shakhtar last season

It is no great secret that this season's championship will once again be a battle between the big two of Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kiev. But, for the first time in four years, Dynamo might just fancy their chances of snatching the title after investing over £14million in new talent this summer.

Dynamo Kiev's most impressive acquisition was Croatia's Niko Kranjcar, who was signed from Tottenham Hotspur for £6million. The attacking midfielder, who turns 28 in August, is hungry for first-team football after being sidelined by his former club and is desperate to help Dynamo break up Shakhtar's monopoly.

"I had numerous options from different clubs, but I've joined a very ambitious side that targets only the highest tasks, both on the domestic front and in Europe," says Kranjcar, who had been on Dynamo's wanted list since 2003. "I nearly found my way to Kiev much earlier but my father, Zlatko, advised me first to test myself in the top league in Europe. Now I'm fully ready to help Dynamo win the league title, the trophy the fans have been lacking for the previous three seasons."

Kranjcar will be joined in midfield by another top-quality signing, Miguel Veloso, who was brought from Genoa after the Euro finals, where he helped Portugal reach the semis.

Dynamo also landed two promising Ukrainian midfielders. Vitaliy Kaverin, a European Under-19 title winner in 2009, was recruited from Dnipro for £1m, while Dynamo academy graduate and former Ukraine under-21 star Andriy Bohdanov returned to the club for £1.2m from city rivals Arsenal Kiev.

With so many midfielders coming in, international regular Oleksandr Aliyev has been allowed to join Dnipro on loan, while Dynamo coach Yuri Semin hopes to fund the arrival of a new target man.

> Kranjcar, hungry for first-team football, is desperate to help Dynamo break up the Shakhtar monopoly

"During the previous seasons we took a chance on the graduates of our football school, but it was not enough to rival Shakhtar on equal terms," says the 65-year-old. "So this season we've signed experienced performers that I'm sure will help us dethrone them."

Champions **Shakhtar Donetsk**'s only big summer signing has been naturalised Serb striker Marco Devych from Metalist Kharkiv – the "scorer" of Ukraine's disallowed goal against England in the Euros. "The previous season was positive for us as we won the championship and cup but we were not too careful in the Champions League," says Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu.

"This season we have not changed our priorities. Our task is to retain both domestic trophies but with more emphasis on our European adventures."

Having lost Devych to Shakhtar, **Metalist Kharkiv** recruited Brazilian forward Willian Gomes from Corinthians on a five-year deal. They have invested heavily in the past but, like Shakhtar, have been relatively quiet in the transfer market and will rely heavily on their six Argentinian players, including Jose Sosa who has been handed the captain's armband, as they challenge for the second Champions League spot.

Now in his third year with **Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk**, experienced Spanish coach Juande Ramos is under pressure to break into the top two. Nigerian defender Michael Odibe has been taken on loan from Siena to bolster a squad that includes Brazilian playmaker Giuliano and compatriot Matheus, plus the on-loan Aliyev.

Oleh Luzhny, formerly Semin's assistant at Dynamo, is now in charge of **Tavriya Simferopol**, who have signed goalkeeper Segiy Pogorelov from **Arsenal Kiev**. To compensate for losing Pogorelov and Bohdanov, Arsenal have brought in Brazilian defender Rafael Dos Santos and 22-year-old Ghana striker Dominic Adiya from Milan. **Metalurh Donetsk** parted company with Portuguese defender Mario Sergio (who went to APOEL in Cyprus), Russian goalkeeper Dmitriy Nepohodov and Bulgarian striker Chavdar Yankov.

Illichivets Mariupol, who are closely associated with neighbours Shakhtar and traditionally borrow numerous players from the champions, look assured of a comfortable mid-table spot, as do **Chornomorets Odessa**.

At the bottom, **Karpaty Lviv**, **Zorya Luhansk**, **Vorskla Poltava**, **Kryvbas Kryvyi Rih** and **Volyn Lutsk** are likely to fight it out with newcomers **Metalurh Zaporizhya** and **Hoverla Uzhhorod** to avoid the two relegation spots.

Oleg Zadernovsky

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 13, 2012

Mid-season break
December 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013

Season ends
May 25, 2013

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Niko Kranjcar
Tottenham Hotspur to Dynamo Kiev

The Croatian midfielder finally joined Dynamo, nine years after they first made an approach to sign him.

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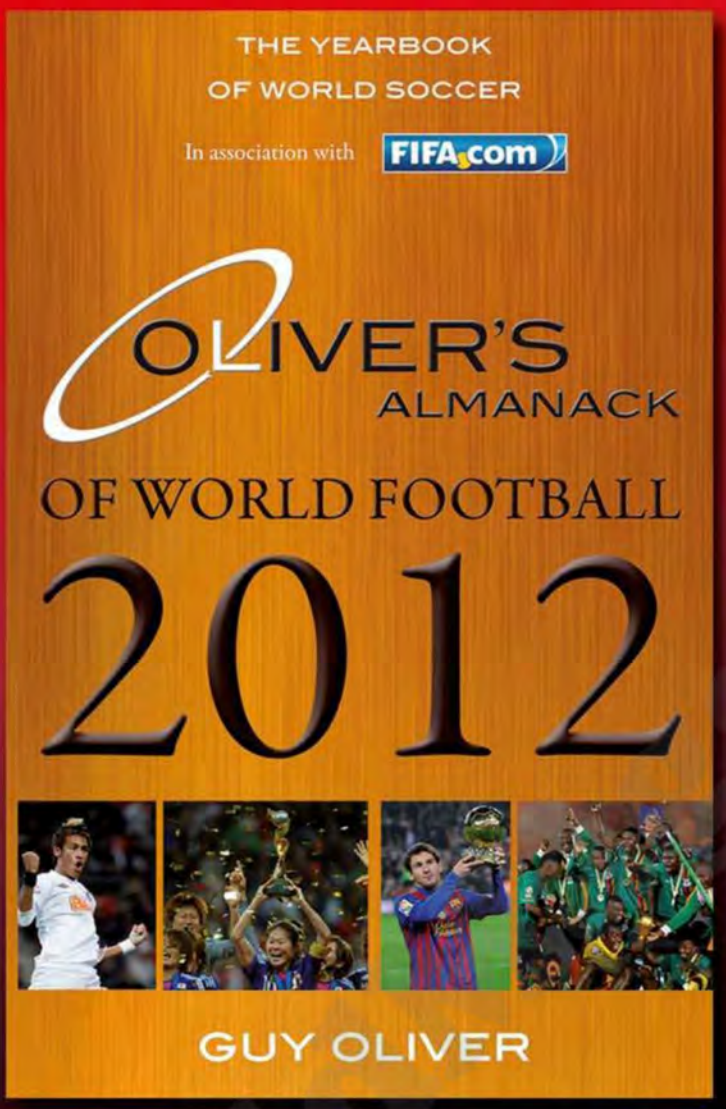

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Complete control

Jonathan Wilson looks at why Germany couldn't dominate games at the Euros the way Spain did

When accusations of dullness flew at Vicente Del Bosque and his Spain side during this summer's Euros, his response was simple: "Control." For the 61-year-old coach, matches and tournaments are not won by the creation of chances but by dominating possession to the extent that the opposition is stifled. Have 30 chances and allow your opponent five and there is a chance that they will win; have five and restrict the other team to none and the worst-case scenario is a penalty shoot-out.

It is a method attritional in ethos and yet aesthetically beautiful – as long as you put aside the desire to see the ball pinging about the penalty area. And, as the past two European Championships and the last World Cup have shown, it is highly effective.

Control is the ideal that has always been at the core of "total football". As Vic Buckingham, who preceded Rinus Michels at both Ajax and Barcelona, said: "If you've got the ball, keep it. The other side can't score."

And if the other team wants to sit back and defend, let them. No matter how many bodies they pack behind the ball, the logic runs, they will crack eventually. The effort, both physical and mental, of chasing Spain's fleet of midfielders is too great for any team to sustain consistently for 90 or 120 minutes. Portugal came closest at Euro 2012, but even then, in extra time, Andres Iniesta missed a glaring chance for Del Bosque's side.

Once you are ahead, denying the opposition the ball and running down the clock becomes a viable end in itself. In the 1973 European Cup Final against Juventus, Ajax – having taken a fourth-minute lead through Johnny Rep – held the ball for what felt like the rest of the game. When Holland attempted something similar in the 1974 World Cup Final it was taken as evidence of a desire to humiliate West Germany. Maybe to an extent it was, but it was also surely born of a defensive urge to protect the lead by controlling possession.

That is the paradox of possession football; it is proactive and yet in its extreme form it becomes incredibly effective as a defensive measure.

Suffocating...Spain deny Italy striker Cassano room in which to work during this summer's Euro Final

> The effort of chasing Spain's fleet of midfielders is too great for any team to sustain over 90 or 120 minutes

"Sometimes people say that football's meaning is only in attack," said Valeriy Lobanovskyi and his collaborator Anatoliy Zelentsov in their book *The Methodological Basis of the Development of Training Models*.

"But it is nearer the truth to say that when we possess the ball, we are attacking; when our opponents possess the ball, we are defending. From this fundamental, football strategy is derived: how, where and when to attack or defend."

Sceptical as many were about Spain's style – at least until the Final, when Italy came out and allowed them to play with the *profundidad* (depth) that Del Bosque kept complaining they were missing – the importance of control was demonstrated by Germany's plight. They were much praised at the 2010 World Cup for the incisiveness of their attacking. Up to a point that was justified: the inter-movement of Thomas Muller, Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose, allied to the intelligent probing of Mesut Ozil, was devastating when they had space to play in. Discounting the third-place play-off game, in the three matches in which Germany scored in the opening 10 minutes – against Australia, England and Argentina – they then went on to score four in total as their opponents became ragged in chasing the game. In the other three games – against Serbia, Ghana and Spain – they managed a total of just one goal.

Proactive style

Joachim Low clearly recognised the deficiency and over the past two years he has tried to shift Germany to a more proactive style of play. The problem is that neither Muller nor Podolski are quite gifted enough technically to unlock massed defences – which was part of

Pushing on...Khedira surges forward against Italy

the reason they were left out for the Euro quarter-final against Greece in favour of the more obviously skilful Andre Schurrle and Marco Reus. In a sense it was a bold move, trying to address the issue before it had developed into a real problem. Germany had, after all, won all three of their games in the supposed "group of death", but the focus on the attacking changes hid Germany's real deficiency – which was at the back of midfield.

Where Spain were always comfortable in midfield, with at least one holding player – sometimes Xabi Alonso but more usually Sergio Busquets – always protecting the central defenders,

Germany's real deficiency was at the back of midfield where they were at times alarmingly open

Germany were at times alarmingly open. That they had let in 10 goals in the five friendlies between the end of qualifying and the start of the Euros was widely written off as a blip – especially as five of those goals had come in one game against Switzerland, when Bayern Munich's players were absent – but they were an unheeded warning.

The holding midfield duo of Bastian Schweinsteiger and Sami Khedira were not as secure as they were at the World Cup. In South Africa, Khedira sat very deep, allowing Schweinsteiger to break forward and link with the creative trident. But since moving to Real Madrid, Khedira has become more adventurous, not merely a stopper and a spoiler in front of the back four but somebody comfortable breaking forward to make late darts into the box – as he did when volleying Germany's second goal against Greece in the quarter-finals.

When playing for Germany, Khedira will have to curb his forward surges or Schweinsteiger, whose form has been uncertain as he feels his way back from injury, must be prepared to sit deep when he goes. But that is not an easy balance to achieve in the limited time available at international level.

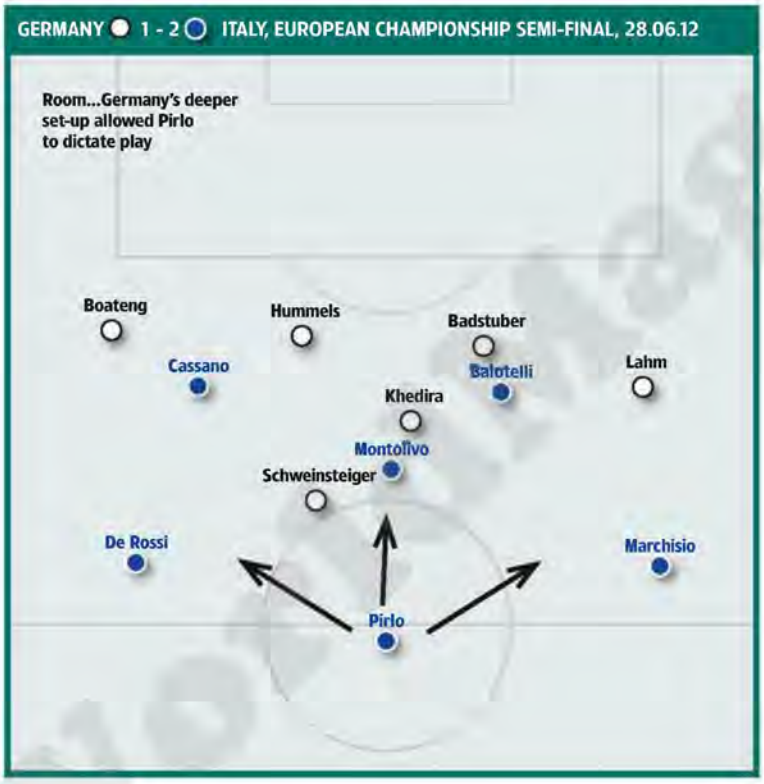
"He's very important as a player for me," said Schweinsteiger. "He opens up spaces going forward, is always available and scores goals. But we can't both be up front during a game. We have to make sure that we know where our positions are and what we have to do."

Against Italy, it turned out Germany didn't. Again and again Antonio Cassano and Mario Balotelli made runs from the space just in front of the back four. Against Spain, Italy were never able to do that, even when they matched them for possession in the first half. Spain had control; Germany never did. WS

ITALY 0 - 4 SPAIN, EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL, 01.07.12

Swamped...Spain's full-backs support the midfield and crowd out Pirlo

GERMANY 1 - 2 ITALY, EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP SEMI-FINAL, 28.06.12



Room...Germany's deeper set-up allowed Pirlo to dictate play

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Talentscout

Alexis ROLIN

CLUB	Nacional
COUNTRY	Uruguay
POSITION	Centre-back
AGE	23 (07.02.89)
HONOURS	2011 Uruguayan Primera, 2012 Uruguayan Primera

Nacional did a good bit of business when they sold Sebastian Coates to Liverpool in August 2011. Not only did they cash in on one young centre-half, they also made space for another.

Rolin came through the club's youth ranks alongside Coates and the two are firm friends. But while the younger Coates was fast-tracked into the first team his pal's career took longer to get started.

Left out of the club's 25-man Libertadores Cup squad last year amid speculation that he might be loaned out to gain experience, Rolin did not make his competitive debut for Nacional until May 2011 at the age of 22 – unusually late for a Uruguayan. But selected at left-back for his first appearance, in the big Montevideo derby game against Penarol, he immediately looked at home and has remained a fixture ever since.

The son of a youth-team coach, Rolin followed his father to training at Danubio from the age of five until the pair moved on to Nacional together five years later.

"I started out as a centre-back," says Rolin junior. "But in the youth teams I also played in midfield and at full-back."

The biggest tribute that can be paid to Rolin is that there has been no noticeable drop in Nacional's defensive quality since the loss of Coates. He gave a magnificent display away to Vasco da Gama of Brazil in the first week of this year's Libertadores the day after his 23rd birthday. He celebrated by giving his team the platform for a 2-1 win, passing assuredly out of defence with either foot and keeping Vasco at bay with his timing in the tackle, eye-catching pace and excellent reading of the game.

> "I'm always trying to anticipate an opponent's move to gain an extra second or two"
> Alexis Rolin

"I always try to anticipate an opponent's move to gain an extra second or two," he says.

While not as commanding in the air as Coates, Rolin is quicker over the ground and can either man mark or drop deeper and cover. Although they rarely played together in the Nacional first team, Rolin and Coates appear ideally suited to play alongside each other and they could be in harness this summer as both have been included in Uruguay's squad for the Olympic tournament.

"Being on that list makes me so proud," says Rolin. "Wearing the shirt of Uruguay is priceless.

"Defending your country is the greatest moment for a player."

Tim Vickery

Nacional hero...Rolin (in red) makes his presence felt against Alianza Lima's Jonathan Charquero during a Libertadores Cup tie

Daniel DIDAVI

CLUB	Stuttgart
COUNTRY	Germany
AGE	22 (21.02.90)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Nuremberg (loan)

A spell on loan can often revitalise the faltering fortunes of a footballer, and that was certainly the case when the Germany under-21 attacking midfielder was shipped out by Stuttgart in the summer of 2011 for 12-months at fellow Bundesliga side Nuremberg.

Forced to the Stuttgart fringes because of injury problems, he jumped at the opportunity. And after a shaky beginning – which was marked by cartilage trouble as well as a certain lack of willingness to put in a defensive shift – he eventually came good at Nuremberg, deploying his incisiveness, creativity and goals to keep the team comfortably away from the relegation zone. Make no mistake, without his thrust, inventive spark and blistering shooting from long distance, Nuremberg would have found it far more difficult to survive.

"Dida" attributes his breakthrough year to the faith shown in him by Nuremberg coach Dieter Hecking and, keen to stay at a club where he felt wanted, he announced towards the end of last season that he wanted to remain at the Frankenstadion.

"I'm not one to say thanks and goodbye," he said. "I have much to thank this club for. They always supported me."

But rules are rules, and in the end he had to retrace his steps – the one consolation being an improved contract with Stuttgart until 2016.

The son of a German mother and a father from the African state of Benin, he joined Stuttgart at 13 but got his big chance at a club who rightly have a reputation for extensively using young German talent. Midfielders such as Ilkay Gundogan of Borussia Dortmund and Werder Bremen's Mehmet Ekici are just two examples of the many youngsters who have made use of the Nuremberg springboard.

Only one factor could stop him from reaching the top and that is his body's fragility. Injuries have been a constant companion up to now and, after a recent operation on his left-knee, he will have to sit out the initial stages of the new season.

Nick Bidwell

Cheikhou KOUYATE

CLUB	Anderlecht (Blg)
COUNTRY	Senegal
AGE	22 (21.12.89)
PREVIOUS CLUBS	Brussels (Blg), Kortrijk (Blg, loan)
CAPS	3 (0 goals)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	v South Africa, February 2012
HONOURS	2010 Belgian league, 2012 Belgian league

Twice a domestic champion with Anderlecht and considered one of the most accomplished defenders in the Pro League, the Senegalese centre-back was not always on easy street in the Belgian capital.

First brought to Europe in the autumn of 2007 as a defensive midfielder by Brussels, he was good enough to hold down a regular spot, but one important factor was missing – remuneration.

"I was just never paid," recalls Kouyate. "They didn't even want to give me money so I could go home for the funeral of my grandmother. I found that terrible. They treated me like a slave. Finally I had to take legal advice and break free from my contract."

Fortunately, Anderlecht were monitoring the situation closely and he joined on a free transfer in the summer of 2008. They immediately sent him on a season-long loan to fellow top-flight side Kortrijk, where assistant coach Yves Vanderhaeghe – once a gutsy midfielder for Belgium and Anderlecht – took the African under his wing.

"Vanderhaeghe was especially good for me," says the Dakar-born Kouyate. "He taught me to be positive and assertive and how to best respond to pressure. I owe him an awful lot."

Within a few months of returning to Anderlecht, he had established himself as the team's principal midfield sentinel. And since being switched to central defence last term he has become even more important.

In contrast to the serenity and self-confidence he exudes on the pitch, he was remarkably uncertain about his international future. An application for Belgian citizenship seemed at one point to signal his intention, but he could not deny his African roots and he is now 100 per cent Senegalese, winning his first full cap against South Africa early this year and earning selection for the London Olympics.

Nick Bidwell

Marco VERRATTI

CLUB	PSG (Fra)
COUNTRY	Argentina
AGE	19 (05.11.92)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Pescara

Paris Saint-Germain and their paymasters at Qatar Sports Investment are not only looking to corner the high-roller market in the shape of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Thiago Silva, Ezequiel Lavezzi and Javier Pastore. PSG's technical director Leonardo also has a medium- to long-term strategy, hence the £8.5million he splashed out this summer on Italian midfield starlet Verratti, the teenager who played such a prominent role in Pescara's recent promotion to Serie A but has yet to play top-flight football himself.

Last spring, the consensus of opinion among the calcio cognoscenti was that the brilliant Verratti was Juventus-bound, that the newly crowned Italian champions had identified him as the heir apparent to veteran midfield "quarter-back" Andrea Pirlo. A lifelong Juve fan, the teenager would have jumped at the chance to become a *bianconeri*, but ultimately the move fell through, scuppered by Pescara's insistence on the fee being paid in cash rather than players.

At the same time as Juventus' interest was cooling, PSG's acquisitive instincts were burning ever hotter. Mightily impressed by Verratti's technical gifts and intelligence, the club's Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti pushed hard for a deal to be done. With the French club offering more than Pescara's asking price and the novice bewitched by the prospect of joining an empire in the making, negotiations soon came to fruition.

"People are right to talk about me being a little anonymous at the moment," smiled a relaxed Verratti at his welcome-to-Paris press conference. "Compared to the big stars at PSG, who've already won many things, I still have everything to prove. This is a beautiful adventure, the next step in my apprenticeship. I want to show off my talent and prove in every game here that I belong in such an ambitious club.

"PSG have given me the opportunity to play with champions that I normally watch on TV. I do think that clubs abroad have more time for young players than back home. Italy would do well to stand by its own youngsters."

While his claim that the Italian game does not put enough emphasis on youth development, generally does hold some water, in his own case, he was being slightly unfair. Both at the Pescara academy and with Italy's junior representative teams, he has been carefully nurtured. And in the last 12 months at Pescara he benefited enormously from the know-how and advice of coach Zdenek Zeman, the veteran Czech who is now in charge of Roma.

It was Zeman's decision to switch Verratti from "the hole" to the role of deep-lying playmaker – and what a spectacular reconfiguration it proved.

The youngster went on to occupy centre-stage in Serie B with his laser-like long passes, capacity for killer passes in congested areas, comfort on the ball, prowess as a dribbler and calm, unhurried reaction to an opposition pressing game.

Unsurprisingly for one so young, he does have his faults, namely his lightweight physique and a lack of goals. Yet he is a rare talent all the same, and certainly deserved his place in Cesare Prandelli's preliminary 32-man squad for Euro 2012. He would not make the final cut in this instance but if all goes according to plan, his name is most unlikely ever to be erased again.

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Europa League...Grevenmacher's Laurent Schiltz (right) holds off Elton Mucollari of Tirana

BRAZIL

China at home

Mano Menezes' side will play a friendly at home to China, in the north-east city of Recife, on September 10.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Giants humbled

Seven-times continental champions Egypt were knocked out of the African Nations Cup qualifiers following a 1-1 draw with Central African Republic in Bangui.

The hosts went ahead through captain Foxi Kethevoama midway through the first half, and even though Emad Moteab equalised later on, the minnows went through to the second round stage with a shock 4-3 victory on aggregate.

Final...Morocco's Abderrazak El Mnassfi (left) against Libya

MALAWI

Commemorative win

Joseph Kamwendo scored the only goal as Malawi beat Zambia 1-0 in a match to commemorate 48 years of the country's independence.

MOROCCO

Arab champions

Having picked a squad composed of home-based players, Eric Gerets' side won their first-ever Arab Nations Cup title, beating Libya in a penalty shoot-out, following extra time, after the Final had finished 1-1 in 90 minutes.

Three Libyans and two Moroccans missed their penalties in the shoot-out, leaving Morocco's Ismail Benlamalem to score the winning spot kick.

Raja Casablanca striker

Internationals

ARAB NATIONS CUP

In Saudi Arabia

Group A

June 22 - Taif
Saudi Arabia 4 (Al Sahlawi 22, 90+3, Al Mehyani 51, 56)
Kuwait 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)
Sent off: Al Matouq (Kuwait)

June 25 - Taif
Kuwait 2 (Khamis 27, Al Rashidi 90+2)
Palestine 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Sheikh (UAE)

June 28 - Taif
Saudi Arabia 2 (Shuhail 9, Al Zealaiy 85)
Palestine 2 (Abu Saleh pen 45, Amour 73)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Abdel Rahman (Sud)

ARAB NATIONS CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia (Q)	2	1	1	0	6	2	4
Kuwait	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Palestine	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Group B

June 23 - Jeddah
Morocco 4 (El Bahri 17, Salhi 78, Al Hayam og 83, Benjelloun 90+3)
Bahrain 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Balooshi (Qat)

June 23 - Jeddah
Libya 3 (Saad pen 17, Salama 53, Mabrouk 88)
Yemen 1 (Al Sasi 68)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jaber (Jor)

June 26 - Jeddah
Bahrain 0
Yemen 2 (Al Worafi pen 53, Baroies 65)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jedidi (Tun)

June 26 - Jeddah
Libya 0
Morocco 0
Ref: Haimoudi (Alg)

June 29 - Taif
Libya 2 (Saad pen 71, Al Ghannody 74)
Bahrain 1 (Al Khattal 38)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Sheikh (UAE)

June 29 - Jeddah
Yemen 0
Morocco 4 (Salhi pen 10, 48, 58, pen 63)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Amri (Sau)

ARAB NATIONS CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (Q)	3	2	1	0	8	0	7
Libya (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Yemen	3	1	0	2	3	7	3
Bahrain	3	0	0	3	1	8	0

Group C

June 24 - Jeddah
Iraq 1 (Mustafa Karim 89)
Lebanon 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jiyed (Mor)

June 24 - Jeddah
Egypt U-23 1 (Magdi 38)
Sudan 1 (El Amin 80)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Amri (Sau)

June 27 - Jeddah
Lebanon 0
Sudan 2 (Ankba 55, Bashir 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jaber (Jor)

June 27 - Jeddah
Iraq 2 (Mustafa Karim 49, Abdul Zahra 74)
Egypt U-23 1 (Gomaa pen 45+4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Balooshi (Qat)

June 30 - Riyadh
Egypt U-23 1 (Hamoudi 45+1)
Lebanon 1 (Maghrebi 82)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jiyed (Mor)

June 30 - Jeddah
Sudan 1 (Hamad 9)
Iraq 1 (Shakir 5)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Jedidi (Tun)

ARAB NATIONS CUP – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Sudan	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Egypt U-23	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Lebanon	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

The 3 group winners and the runner-up with the best record (against the teams placed 1st and 3rd in their respective group) qualified for the semi-finals

Semi-finals

July 3 - Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 0
Libya 2 (Al Sebaee 75, Saad pen 90+6)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)

July 3 - Jeddah
Morocco 2 (El Gharib 23, Salhi 28)
Iraq 1 (Mustafa Karim pen 90+6)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Haimoudi (Alg)

3rd-place match

July 5 - Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 0
Iraq 1 (Abdul Zahra 16)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abdelrahman (Sud)

Final

July 6 - Jeddah
Libya 1 (Al Badri 89)
Morocco 1 (El Bahri 5)
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 1-1. **Ref:** Jedidi (Tun)
Morocco 3-1 on pens
Morocco: El Qinani - Soulaimani, Benlamalem, Mrani, El Gharib, Saidi, Jahouh, El Bahri (Rafik), El Mnassfi (Khadrouf), Benjelloun (Gadoum), Salhi.

2013 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

1st round

2nd leg

June 30 - Bangui
Central African Republic 1 (F Kethevoama 24)
Egypt 1 (Moteab 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000
Central African Republic 4-3 on agg

2nd round draw

Cape Verde Islands v Cameroon
Central African Republic v Burkina Faso
DR Congo v Equatorial Guinea
Gabon v Togo
Ghana v Malawi
Guinea v Niger
Ivory Coast v Senegal
Liberia v Nigeria
Libya v Algeria
Mali v Botswana
Mozambique v Morocco
Sierra Leone v Tunisia
Sudan v Ethiopia
Zambia v Uganda
Zimbabwe v Angola
1st legs - Sep 7-9; 2nd legs - Oct 12-14, 2012

Winners qualify for finals, to which host South Africa qualifies automatically

FRIENDLIES

Monday, June 18

June 18 - Taif
Saudi Arabia 0
Morocco 2 (Abourazzouk 55, Benjelloun 57)
HT: 0-0

Saturday, June 23

June 23 - Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam 1 (Sidique og 63)
Mozambique 0
HT: 0-0

Friday, July 6

July 6 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (Kamwendo 79)
Zambia 0
HT: 0-0

Saturday, July 7

July 7 - Road Town
British Virgin Islands 1 (Septus 75)
Anguilla 0
HT: 0-0

Tuesday, July 10

July 10 - Juba
South Sudan 2 (Justin pen 19, Joseph 42)
Uganda 2 (Okhuti 7, Ogwang 39)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Onyango (Ken)
Sent off: Okhuti (Uganda) 22min

2014 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA SECTION

● 5 finals places available

2nd round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ethiopia	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Cent Af Rep	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
South Africa	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Botswana	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Next fixtures: Ethiopia v Botswana; South Africa v Central African Republic (22.03.13)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Sierra Leone	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Eq Guinea	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Cape Verde Is	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Next fixtures: Equatorial Guinea v Cape Verde Islands; Tunisia v Sierra Leone (22.03.13)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Tanzania	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Morocco	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Gambia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Next fixtures: Ivory Coast v Gambia; Tanzania v Morocco (22.03.13)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sudan	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Ghana	2	1	0	1	7	1	3
Zambia	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Lesotho	2	0	1	1	0	7	1

Next fixtures: Ghana v Sudan; Lesotho v Zambia (22.03.13)

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Congo	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Gabon	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Burkina Faso	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Niger	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Next fixtures: Burkina Faso v Niger; Congo v Gabon (22.03.13)

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Namibia	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Malawi	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Kenya	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Next fixtures: Namibia v Malawi; Nigeria v Kenya (22.03.13)

Yassine Salhi was the competition's top scorer with six goals, including all four in Morocco's 4-0 victory over Yemen.

SOUTH SUDAN

International debut

The world's newest nation made its official debut on the international stage with a 2-2 draw against a Uganda side made up of mainly under-20 players.

South Sudan captain Richard Justin and India-based professional James Joseph were on target for the hosts.

Afterwards, coach Zoran Dordevic explained it was difficult to prepare his players for the game as many had joined up late with the squad. However, he said the performance was "a promising first step".

More success...Spain under-19s

SPAIN

Under-19s triumph

La Rojita claimed their sixth European Under-19 title in 11 years – and a second in succession – beating Greece 1-0 in the Final with a goal from Jese Rodriguez of Real Madrid, who was the tournament's top scorer with five.

Spain's line-up included three players who appeared in the 2011 Final: Gerard Deulofeu, Paco Alcacer and Jose Campana. Coach Julen Lopetegui said: "The players' mentality was spot on and they very much deserved their win."

Spain booked their place at the 2013 Under-20 World Cup in Turkey – which takes place from June 21 to July 13 next year – along with Greece, Portugal, England, France and Croatia.

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Guinea	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Zimbabwe	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Mozambique	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Next fixtures: Egypt v Zimbabwe; Mozambique v Guinea (22.03.13)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benin	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Algeria	2	1	0	1	5	2	3
Mali	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Rwanda	2	0	1	1	1	5	1

Next fixtures: Algeria v Benin; Rwanda v Mali (22.03.13)

Group I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libya	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
DR Congo	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Cameroon	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Togo	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Next fixtures: Cameroon v Togo; DR Congo v Libya (22.03.13)

Group J

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Uganda	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Angola	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Liberia	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Next fixtures: Liberia v Uganda; Senegal v Angola (22.03.13)

Remaining matchdays:
22.03.13, 07.06.13, 14.06.13, 06.09.13
Each team plays 6 times

● Group winners will qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

● The 10 qualifiers will be paired in 5 2-leg ties (to be played between 11.10.13 and 19.11.13), the winners of which will qualify for the finals

ASIA SECTION

● 4.5 finals places available

4th round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Iran	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Qatar	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Uzbekistan	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Lebanon	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Next fixtures: Lebanon v Iran; Uzbekistan v South Korea (11.09.12) (rest day: Qatar)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	3	2	1	0	10	1	7
Iraq	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Australia	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Oman	3	0	2	1	1	4	2
Jordan	2	0	1	1	1	7	1

Next fixtures: Japan v Iraq; Jordan v Australia (11.09.12) (rest day: Oman)

Remaining matchdays:
11.09.12, 16.10.12, 14.11.12, 26.03.13, 04.06.13, 11.06.13, 18.06.13
Each team plays 8 times

● The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals
● The 2 3rd-placed teams will meet in a 2-leg play-off (06.09.13 & 10.09.13), the winner of which will meet the 5th-placed South American team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

CONCACAF SECTION

● 3.5 finals places available

3rd round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Jamaica	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Guatemala	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Antigua & B'da	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Next fixtures: Guatemala v Antigua & Barbuda; Jamaica v United States (07.09.12)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Costa Rica	2	1	1	0	6	2	4
El Salvador	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Guyana	2	0	0	2	1	7	0

Next fixtures: Costa Rica v Mexico; El Salvador v Guyana (07.09.12)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Canada	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Honduras	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Cuba	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Next fixtures: Canada v Panama; Cuba v Honduras (07.09.12)

Remaining matchdays:
07.09.12, 11.09.12, 12.10.12, 16.10.12
Each team plays 6 times

● The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 4th round

4th round

● The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played between 06.02.13 and 15.10.13), with the top 3 qualifying for the finals
● The 4th-placed team will meet the Oceania section winner in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

EUROPE SECTION

● 13 finals places available

Group A

1st round of fixtures: Croatia v Macedonia; Wales v Belgium (07.09.12); Scotland v Serbia (08.09.12)

Group B

1st round of fixtures: Bulgaria v Italy; Malta v Armenia (07.09.12); Denmark v Czech Republic (08.09.12)

Group C

1st round of fixtures: Germany v Faroe Islands; Kazakhstan v Republic of Ireland (07.09.12)
Group also contains: Austria (1st game 11.09.12, home to Germany) & Sweden (1st game 11.09.12, home to Kazakhstan)

Group D

1st round of fixtures: Andorra v Hungary; Estonia v Romania; Holland v Turkey (07.09.12)

Group E

1st round of fixtures: Albania v Cyprus; Iceland v Norway; Slovenia v Switzerland (07.09.12)

Group F

1st round of fixtures: Azerbaijan v Israel; Luxembourg v Portugal; Russia v Northern Ireland (07.09.12)

Group G

1st round of fixtures: Latvia v Greece; Liechtenstein v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Lithuania v Slovakia (07.09.12)

Group H

1st round of fixtures: Moldova v England; Montenegro v Poland (07.09.12)
Group also contains: San Marino (1st game 11.09.12, home to Montenegro) & Ukraine (1st game 11.09.12, away to England)

Group I

1st round of fixtures: Finland v France; Georgia v Belarus (07.09.12)
Group also contains: Spain (1st game 11.09.12, away to Georgia)

Games to be played between 07.09.12 and 15.10.13
Each team plays 10 times (except Gp I, 8 times)

● The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals
● The 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 2-leg play-offs (15.11.13 & 19.11.13), the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

OCEANIA SECTION

● 0.5 finals places available

3rd round

(single, round-robin group)
1st round of fixtures: New Caledonia v New Zealand; Solomon Islands v Tahiti (07.09.12)

Games to be played between 07.09.12 and 26.03.13
Each team plays 6 times

● Group winner will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

SOUTH AMERICA SECTION

● 5.5 finals places available, one of which goes automatically to host Brazil

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chile	6	4	0	2	11	10	12
Uruguay	5	3	2	0	14	6	11
Argentina	5	3	1	1	11	4	10
Ecuador	5	3	0	2	6	6	9
Venezuela	6	2	2	2	4	6	8
Colombia	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Bolivia	6	1	1	4	7	11	4
Paraguay	5	1	1	3	4	9	4
Peru	5	1	0	4	6	11	3

Next fixtures: Argentina v Paraguay; Colombia v Uruguay; Ecuador v Bolivia; Peru v Venezuela (07.09.12) (rest day: Chile)

Remaining matchdays:
07.09.12, 11.09.12, 12.10.12, 16.10.12, 22.03.13, 26.03.13, 07.06.13, 11.06.13, 08.09.13, 10.09.13, 11.10.13, 15.10.13
Each team plays 16 times

● The top 4 will qualify for the finals
● The 5th-placed team will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

FRIENDLY FIXTURES

Aug 11: El Salvador v Guatemala (Los Angeles, USA)
Aug 13: Jordan v Uzbekistan (Amman)
Aug 14: Costa Rica v Peru (East Rutherford, USA)
Liechtenstein v Andorra (Vaduz)
San Marino v Malta (San Marino)
Aug 15: Albania v Moldova
Angola v Mozambique
Armenia v Belarus (Yerevan)
Austria v Turkey (Vienna)
Azerbaijan v Bahrain (Baku)
Belgium v Holland (Brussels)
Bolivia v Benin (La Paz)
Bulgaria v Cyprus (Sofia)
Croatia v Switzerland (Split)
Denmark v Slovakia (Odense)
Ecuador v Chile (East Rutherford, USA)
El Salvador v Jamaica (Washington DC, USA)
England v Italy (Berne, Switzerland)
Estonia v Poland (Tallinn)
France v Uruguay (Le Havre)
Germany v Argentina (Frankfurt)
Hungary v Israel (Budapest)
Iceland v Faroe Islands (Reykjavik)
Japan v Venezuela (Sapporo)
Jordan v Uzbekistan (Amman)
Luxembourg v Georgia (Oberkorn)
Macedonia v Lithuania (Skopje)
Mexico v United States (Mexico City)
Montenegro v Latvia (Podgorica)
Morocco v Guinea (Tangiers)
Northern Ireland v Finland (Belfast)
Norway v Greece (Oslo)
Oman v Egypt (Salalah)
Paraguay v Guatemala (Washington DC, USA)
Portugal v Panama (Faro)
Puerto Rico v Spain (Bayamon)
Russia v Ivory Coast (Moscow)
Scotland v Australia (Edinburgh)
Serbia v Republic of Ireland (Belgrade)
Singapore v Hong Kong (Singapore)
Slovenia v Romania (Ljubljana)
South Korea v Zambia (Seoul)
Sweden v Brazil (Stockholm)
Ukraine v Czech Republic (Odessa)
Wales v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Llanelli)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA PREMIER LEAGUE

Zeljeznicar aim for back-to-back titles

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 3, 2012
Mid-season break
November 10, 2012 to March 9, 2013
Season ends
May 25, 2013

Despite the Bosnian league's low status within the European game and its poor attendances, club owners still have huge expectations of their coaching staff. Last season, 15 of the 16 clubs in the top flight replaced their coach – and most of them more than once.

The only man to survive was Amar Osim, who steered **Zeljeznicar** to the double. His side dominated totally, stretching an unbeaten run to 35 matches and scoring the most league goals (68) while conceding the joint-least (17). Most of last term's title-winning squad remain, including Eldin Adilovic, who was the competition's top scorer with 20 goals, and the leading assist-provider Zajko Zeba.

Zeljeznicar are now aiming to become the first club since the post-war unification of Bosnian football to retain the title, yet the league is everything but predictable, having produced six different champions in seven years.

The strongest challenge will come from **Siroki Brijeg**, the cup finalists and last season's runners-up. They were the most active club in the transfer market, adding a couple of experienced former internationals to an already solid squad.

Borac Banja Luka disappointed their supporters by losing in the early stages of the Europa League to Montenegro's Celik Niksic, which led to the sacking of Slavisa Bozicic, their fourth coach since they won the title in 2011.

The list of the potential title winners probably ends with **Sarajevo**, who last won the league in 2007. Ex-Werder Bremen midfielder Said Husejinovic is their key player, but given the financial situation of most Bosnian clubs it wouldn't be a surprise if he was sold before the transfer window closed.

Hard to stop...Zeljeznicar's Eldin (left) battles with Marciano of Siroki Brijeg in last season Bosnian Cup Final

> Maintaining the ethnic balance of Bosniak, Serb and Croat clubs has so far prevented a reduction in the number of clubs in the league

Celik Zenica have ambitions for a Europa League spot next season, as do **Olimpic**. **Velez Mostar** are celebrating their 90th anniversary but will be happy to avoid a relegation battle, while city rivals **Zrinjski** are in better financial shape but lack title-winning quality.

Zvijezda Gradacac are a stable mid-table club, while the rest of the league will be consumed by economic problems and the battle to avoid relegation.

For years it's been a tight situation at the bottom, with only a couple of points dividing the clubs from spots eight to 16. **Leotar**, **Slavija**, **Travnik** and **Rudar Prijedor** will all hope to stay out of a relegation scrap.

GOSK Gabela saved their status on the final day of last season against Velez, but are destined for another tough season, along with **Radnik** and **Gradina**.

Poor results in European competitions and the financial problems faced by clubs have forced the federation to consider reducing the number of clubs in the league. However, a complex situation – maintaining the ethnic balance of Bosniak, Serb and Croat clubs – has so far prevented any changes, even though most rational fans hope that something is done, for the good of football.

Sasa Ibrulj

BULGARIA A PFG

A third trophy for Ludogorets

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 11, 2012
Season ends
May 2013

Last season, for the first time ever, the league title went to a club from outside the capital, Sofia, for a third consecutive year.

In their debut campaign in the top flight, **Ludogorets** from the north-eastern city of Razgrad claimed both the domestic championship and the Bulgarian Cup. And their quest for success shows no sign of abating this term as they picked up a third trophy in July, beating Lokomotiv Plovdiv 3-1 to win the Super Cup. New signing Junior Caicara from Portugal's Gil Vicente, opened the scoring, with captain Emil Gargorov and Brazilian striker Marcelinho also on the scoresheet.

Having lost the league title on the final day of last season, **CSKA Sofia** have serious ambitious to be crowned champions for the first time since 2008, and they have brought in several newcomers, including defender Civard Sprockel from Anorthosis Famagusta and former Bulgaria international Hristo Yanev from Litex.

Speculation...Stoichkov is staying put

Like their big city rivals, **Levski Sofia** also have title aspirations and have brought in Beroe coach Ilian Iliev with the aim of securing the A PFG championship. "I don't want to make a revolution, but at Levski changes are necessary," says Iliev, who won the league three times as a– player with Levski in the 1990s. He has signed former Portugal under-21 striker Joao Silva, who was on loan at Vitoria Setubal in his homeland last season.

Beroe replaced Iliev with Ivko Ganchev, but they have lost a lot of last season's side. **Montana** also have a new coach in Atanas Dzhambazki, as do promoted sides **Botev Plovdiv** – champions in 1929 and 1967 – who brought in former Litex boss Ferario Spassov in place of Kostadin Vidolov and **Pirin Gotse Delchev**, who appointed Yakov Paparkov for their first-ever season in the top flight.

Despite all the speculation, Hristo Stoichkov is still coach of **Litex Lovech** and they will be hoping for a third title in four years.

Chernomorets were the surprise team last time out but could struggle, while **Lokomotiv Plovdiv** start the new campaign with high hopes but with several key players having moved on.

Slavia Sofia celebrate their century next year and former players Georgi Petkov and Chavdar Yankov have rejoined the club. **Cherno More** have kept most of last season's squad, while **Lokomotiv Sofia** will be hoping to erase the memory of last season's 13th-place finish.

Minyor Pernik's financial problems and **Botev Vratsa**'s lack of recruits mean they could face a battle against the drop, along with newcomers **Etar**, who were champions in 1991.

Rumen Paytashev

HUNGARY NB I

Provincial clubs to rule once again

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 27, 2012
Mid-season break
December 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013
Season ends
May 31, 2013

It is hard to see beyond the provincial clubs Debrecen, Gyor and Videoton in this season's championship race and, of the three, **Gyor** have seen the most pre-season activity. Six signings include a foreign midfield trio of former Slovene under-21 Rok Kronaveter, Nemanja Andric, who is a Serb from Rad Belgrade, and twice-capped Czech international Michal Svec. And there will be no distractions as past transfer irregularities keeps Gyor from current European participation.

Videoton won the pre-season Super Cup beating last season's champions Debrecen on penalties. The league runner's-up added Cape Verde international defender Stopira from Feirense to their squad, along with defensive midfielder Filipe Oliveira, who was on loan last season. **Debrecen**'s only major signing is Senegalese striker Ibrahima Sidibe.

Of the Budapest clubs, much is expected from **Honved**. Now under Italian coach Marco Rossi, last year's fourth-place finishers have a mixed bag of newcomers, including Brazilian midfielder Renan. Also in the there-or-thereabouts category should be **Diosgyor**, who can always count on fanatical home support

A number of little-known Africans from the Belgian league have been given trials at **Ujpest**, who were thrashed 5-0 by Kortrijk in a pre-season friendly, while midfielder Daniel Bode from Paks is the most notable new signing at **Ferencvaros**. The promising youngsters at promoted **MTK** suffered an early setback when they were dumped out of the Europa League by Slovakia's Senica, while fellow newcomers **Eger** have been preparing their modest stadium for a rare taste of top-flight football.

Joining Eger in a likely relegation battle could be **Siofok**, **Kaposvar**, **Papa**, **Szombathely Haladas** and a **Paks**, while last year's surprise package **Kecskemet** will suffer after the loss of goalscorer Attila Tokoli, who was one of several impressive signings by **Pecs**.

Peterjon Cresswell

Final...Videoton's Oliviera (right) in last term's 3-0 League Cup win against Kecskemet

MONTENEGRO FIRST LEAGUE

Big four set to dominate again

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 11, 2012
Mid-season break
December 2, 2012 to March 7, 2013
Season ends
to be confirmed

In the six seasons since this Balkan country became an independent state, four clubs have won the league title – and those four are again the biggest candidates for the upcoming season.

Buducnost, from the capital Podgorica, have failed to shine in recent years, mostly due to internal problems. Radisav Dragicevic is the 14th coaching change in the past six years, replacing Miodrag Radulovic, who took a job in Kuwait after he requested new signings that the club could not afford.

Zeta had a fine start to the new season, beating Armenia's top club Pyunik Yerevan in the Europa League qualifiers, and also have title ambitions. They are boosted by the return from a loan spell at Sheriff Tiraspol in Moldova of striker Zarko Korac, whose 72 goals make him the league's all-time top scorer.

Rudar may need to reinforce their squad to challenge, while two-times champions **Mogren** look set to lose two of their best players, with winger Luka Djordjevic signing for Zenit in Russia and midfielder Marko Bakic close to joining Red Star Belgrade.

Of the other sides, **Petrovac** could be dark horses, although the title is probably beyond them, and **Sutjeska** are expected to do well thanks to an improved financial situation and some talented youngsters.

Several clubs have serious financial problems. **Lovcen** are without a coach and half their squad have left, while **Mladost** are without a coach and are still looking for a sponsor.

Promoted **Celik** not only reached the top flight the first time but also won the cup. **Grbalj** and **Mornar** are expected to finish in mid-table, while **Jedinstvo** are likely relegation candidates.

Dejan Panic & Vladimir Novak

On his way...Mogren look set to lose midfielder Bakic

LUXEMBOURG NATIONAL LEAGUE

Money talks in the Grand Duchy

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 4, 2012
Mid-season break
November 25, 2012 to February 15, 2013
Season ends
May 11, 2013

Although Luxembourg's clubs submit to UEFA's licensing criteria, the Grand Duchy is exempt from Financial Fairplay so big-spending owners will continue to have a huge impact domestically.

Great things are expected this season from **Fola Esch**, who are being partly funded by wealthy Luxembourg businessman Gerard Lopez, but the team to beat will once again be **Dudelange**, whose coach Marc Grosjean has the budget and the players to repeat last season's double. No National League side have a full starting XI of pro players, but Dudelange have more than any other.

Europa League...Grevenmacher's Andreas Steffen in action against KF Tirana of Albania

The defending champions, who have won 10 of the last 13 titles, are financed by Flavio Becca, who also helps bankroll the RadioShack Nissan cycling team that employ's Luxembourg's two premier sports stars: the Schleck brothers, Andy and Frank.

Eschewing his previous cheque-book style of ownership, **Kaerjeng** president Emile Muller has vowed to only sign local talent from now on and he has said that he hopes to have an all-Luxembourgers line-up by 2017.

Winners of a record 28 titles, **Jeunesse Esch** have been eclipsed by brash Dudelange of late, but they were only three points off the pace last year and were in this season's Europa League qualifiers, along with the surprise side of last season, **Grevenmacher**, and **Differdange**.

This season's three top-flight newcomers – **Etzella Ettelbruck**, **Jeunesse Canach** and **Wiltz** – will be hoping to make their mark, along with **Petange**, **Progres Niedercorn**, **Racing Luxembourg**, **Hamm Benfica** and **Union Kayl-Tetange**.

Steve Menary

NORTHERN IRELAND IFA PREMIERSHIP

Linfield favourites to win again

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 11, 2012
Season ends
April 2013

It will be a major surprise if **Linfield** fail to retain the title as David Jeffrey's side go for a fourth successive double – something no one has ever achieved in the 121-year history of the Irish league.

Under Jeffrey, who has won nine league titles and seven cups since taking over at Windsor Park in January 1997, Linfield have totally dominated the local scene – as was emphasised by their 14-point margin over runners-up Portadown and a 4-1 victory over Crusaders in the Cup Final last term. And they look to have further strengthened their hand with the addition of Portadown marksman Matthew Tipton to a squad that includes captain Michael Gault and Jamie Mulgrew in midfield, goalkeeper Alan Blayney and strikers Peter Thompson and Mark McAllister.

For Eddie Patterson, manager of Linfield's traditional rivals **Glentoran**, it looks like mission impossible to mount a serious title challenge. The club failed to qualify for Europe for the first time in almost two decades last time out and the East Belfast club's chronic cash crisis saw them banned from making any close-season signings.

Moving from Linfield to **Portadown** is Chris Casement, while Donegal Celtic striker Darren Murray has also joined the Ports. The last team to take the league title outside Belfast, in 2002, Portadown are likely to form the main provincial challenge, while Oran Kearney's **Coleraine** continue to make steady progress, with classy central defender Howard Beverland a key man.

For **Crusaders**, who gained some consolation for their Irish Cup Final defeat when they won the all-Ireland Setanta Cup, the arrival of last season's leading scorer Gary McCutcheon from Ballymena will add some firepower to Stephen Baxter's squad as he teams up with forwards Jordan Owens and Timmy Adamson, who are supported by goalscoring midfielder Chris Morrow.

Cliftonville's astute boss Tommy Breslin will have the services of striker Liam Boyce, who has returned after a couple of years with Bundesliga side Werder Bremen, to aid Joe Gormley and Chris Scannell up front, along with wingers Stephen Garrett and Martin Donnelly.

Newcomers to the top flight are **Ballinamallard United**, who become the first team from the county of Fermanagh to play in the Premier League. Manager "Whitey" Anderson's side had a superb season to win promotion and have a mix of home-grown talent and a couple of imports from a catchment area that includes the west of the Republic of Ireland. Their major signing has been 32-year-old Barbados international goalkeeper Alvin Rouse, who was formerly with Dungannon Swifts.

The "Mallards" are likely to be fighting against **Lisburn Distillery**, **Dungannon Swifts** and **Donegal Celtic** to avoid a bottom-two place, while last season's other strugglers **Glenavon** and **Ballymena United** will hope to make better use of their playing resources this term.

Roy Kitson

Unstoppable...Linfield boss Jeffrey

SLOVENIA PRVALIGA

Maribor chasing record

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 14, 2012
Mid-season break
December 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013
Season ends
May 25, 2013

The 20-point margin of **Maribor**'s title victory last term gives some indication of the task faced by the rest of the PrvaLiga this season. Going for a record 11th Slovene title, they will be boosted by the cash bought in from the sale of striker Etien Velikonja to Cardiff City.

Serbian forward Nikola Komazec is his replacement, but Darko Milanic's side will still be built around such players as Marcos Tavares, Dejan Mezga, Aleksander Rajcevic and Jasmin Handanovic.

Their nearest challengers are likely to be **Olimpija**, who were runners-up last season and lost 2-1 to Maribor in the pre-season Super Cup. New Brazilian striker Franklin Vicente and Spanish defender Inigo Sarasola are interesting additions. Seventh last term, **Domzale** will have much higher hopes this time around and expect great things from young striker Sasa Zivec.

Koper may just improve on last season's fourth place with the arrival of midfielders Miroslav Covilo and Milan Bubalo from Serbian club Hajduk Kula. **Gorica**'s fifth place was their worst finish for nine seasons.

Last season **Celje** maintained a 20-year presence in the Slovene top flight – but only just. Well-travelled Finnish midfielder Marko Kolsi may just add enough experience to make it 21.

For **Mura**, **Triglav** and **Rudar** the main aim is to keep above promoted **Aluminij**, who will need a miracle to stay up. The club from the modest, aluminium-producing town of Kiricevo play on a local park pitch around which only a few hundred fans can gather.

Peterjon Cresswell

On the ball...Brazilian striker Tavares will be a key figure in Maribor's hunt for a record 11th title this season

SLOVAKIA SUPERLIGA

Zilina look strong again

KEY DATES

Season starts
July 13, 2012
Mid-season break
December 2, 2012 to February 28, 2013
Season ends
May 25, 2013

With Dutch coach Frans Adelaar still at the helm, last season's double winners **Zilina** have been boosted by the arrival of Portuguese striker Guima and, from the youth ranks, 16-year-old midfield prodigy Miroslav Kacer.

The great old name of **Spartak Trnava** hasn't featured as often as it should in the higher echelons of the independent Slovak league. In a squad almost entirely comprised of Czech and Slovak players, teenage Senegalese centre-back Djiby Ba will be looking to break into the first team after two seasons in the youth ranks. Incoming goalkeeper Miroslav Filipko will look to replace the veteran Martin Raska and 18-year-old forward Ivan Schranz will hope to add to the three appearances he made at the end of last season.

Argentinian defender Nicolas Gorosito and Trinidadian winger Lester Peltier are the most notable arrivals at **Slovan Bratislava**, where Vladimir Weiss will be seeking to bring the title home two years after their last triumph.

Much-travelled Czech coach Zdenek Psotka has begun his first season at **Senica** with a victory over MTK Budapest in the Europa League. On-loan Panamian striker Rolando Blackburn will be looking to add to his decent strike rate since arriving last spring.

Another incoming coach, Ladislav Simco, will aim to turn things around at former champions **Ruzomberok**. There are also new men in charge at **Dukla Banska Bystrica** and **Tatran Presov**.

Trencin, **Kosice**, **Zlate Moravce** and **Nitra** will all seek the comfort of mid table, as will **Spartak Myjava**, competing in the top flight for the first time in their 92-year history after back-to-back lower league titles.

Peterjon Cresswell

Title challenge...Weiss

WALES PREMIER LEAGUE

Who can halt TNS?

KEY DATES

Season starts
August 16, 2012
Season ends
to be confirmed

Reigning champions **The New Saints** are strong favourites to retain their title, having strengthened their already impressive squad. Ryan Fraughan, a winger on loan from Stockport County last season, has signed a full-time contract with the green-and-whites and manager Craig Harrison has also secured the services of defender Kai Edwards and midfielder Chris Jones from now-defunct Neath.

Runners-up **Bangor City** have also strengthened their squad, with boss Nev Powell taking on three ex-Chester players in defender Liam Brownhill, midfielder Jamie Crowther and forward Chris Simm.

Poor support means **Llanelli** manager Andy Legg has had to restructure his squad after a heavy budget cut in which he lost the league's seven-times leading scorer Rhys Griffiths and captain Stuart Jones. Griffiths has joined **Port Talbot Town** as part of an overall strengthening of last season's squad. His goals should prevent relegation worries.

On the back foot...The New Saints in a Champions League qualifier against Helsingborg

Much criticised last season for the poor drainage of their pitch, **Bala Town** have spent heavily on making good the problem this summer and with a better surface they could be a force to be reckoned with at their Maes Tegid home. As with Bala, **Prestatyn Town** have retained almost all of last season's squad and will be hopeful of making the top six when the league splits in two.

A big and well-organised club with excellent facilities, **Carmarthen Town** under the reins of Mark Aizlewood will have similar ambitions.

Following a change of manager in the latter stages of last season, **Aberystwyth Town** under new boss Tomi Morgan not only avoided the drop but actually crept into the Europa League play-offs. Under their new boss Andy Preece, **Airbus UK Broughton** have virtually revamped their entire squad and will hope for a better campaign than last time out.

Bernie McNally's **Newtown** finished bottom last season but were reprieved by the failure of a licensed club to be promoted from the southern feeder league. A young squad may struggle again unless experienced players can stabilise the side.

Andrew Dyer left **Afan Lido** at the end of last season after winning the League Cup and his replacement, Paul Reid, in his first managerial role, has lost seven of that squad.

Gap Connah's Quay were the only club promoted last season. Manager Mark McGregor had taken the team to two successive northern feeder league titles, with only a licensing failure preventing promotion the first time round. Somewhat of an unknown quantity, it will all depend on how his squad can cope with the step up to the top level.

Mel Thomas

AZERBAIJAN

First-round success

Khazar beat Finland's Kalju 2-0 to record their first-ever victory in European competition and progress to the second qualifying round of the Europa League.

Goals from Ruslan Abisov and Branimir Subasic gave last season's Premier League runners-up a 4-2 victory on aggregate.

Four goals...Mifsud

MALTA

Second-best ever

Valletta's 8-0 thrashing of Andorra's Lusitans was the joint-second biggest victory in Champions League history. Michael Mifsud scored four goals.

MOLDOVA

Sacked then reinstated

Zimbru Chisinau co-owner Adlan Shishkhanov sacked his coach Oleg Bejenari after his side's 0-0 draw with Bangor in the first leg of their Europa League qualifier. However, Bejenari was then reinstated for the return leg and he led the team to a 2-1 victory and a place in the second qualifying round.

"I didn't like the quality we showed against the Welsh team in the first match," said Shishkhanov. "If I need to change the coach every month to score the goals I will do it."

UKRAINE

More silverware

Mircea Lucescu won his 15th trophy in eight years as Shakhtar Donetsk coach with the 2-0 Super Cup win over city rivals Metalurh.

"Strangely enough, every

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - July 3; 2nd legs - July 10

F91 Dudelange (Lux) v Tre Penne (SMa)
7-0, 4-0 (agg 11-0)
Linfield (NIr) v B36 (Far)
0-0, 0-0 (aet) (agg 0-0, Linfield 4-3 on pens)
Valletta (Mlt) v Lusitans (And)
8-0, 1-0 (agg 9-0)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - July 3-5; 2nd legs - July 10-12

Baku (Aze) v Mura (Sln) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Bangor (Wal) v Zimbru (Mol) 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
Birkirkara (Mlt) v Metalurg Skopje (Mac)
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2, Metalurg on away goals)
Bohemians (RIr) v Thor (Ice) 0-0, 1-5 (agg 1-5)
Borac (Bos) v Celik Niksic (Mne)
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Celik on away goals)
Cefn Druids (Wal) v MyPa (Fin) 0-0, 0-5 (agg 0-5)
Cliftonville (NIr) v Kalmar (Swe) 1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Crusaders (NIr) v Rosenborg (Nor) 0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
Dacia (Mol) v Celje (Sln) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)
Differdange (Lux) v NSI (Far) 3-0, 3-0 (agg 6-0)
EB/Streymur (Far) v Gandzasar (Arm)
3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Gandzasar on away goals)
Elfsborg (Swe) v Floriana (Mlt) 8-0, 4-0 (agg 12-0)
FC Santa Coloma (And) v Osijek (Cro)
0-1, 1-3 (agg 1-4)
FH (Ice) v Eschen/Mauren (Lie) 2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)
Flamurtari (Alb) v Honved (Hun) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Jagodina (Ser) v Ordabasy (Kaz) 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
JJK (Fin) v Stabaek (Nor) 2-0, 2-3 (agg 4-3)
Khazar (Aze) v Kalju (Est) 2-2, 2-0 (agg 4-2)
KuPS (Fin) v Llanelli (Wal) 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
La Fiorita (SMa) v Metalurgs Liepaja (Lat)
0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Zhetysu (Kaz) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Levadia (Est) v Siauliai (Lit)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Levadia on away goals)
MTK (Hun) v Senica (Slk) 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Olimpija Ljubljana (Sln) v Jeunesse Esch (Lux)
3-0, 3-0 (agg 6-0)
Pyunik (Arm) v Zeta (Mne) 0-3, 2-1 (agg 2-4)
Renova (Mac) v Libertas (SMa) 4-0, 4-0 (agg 8-0)
Rudar Pljevlja (Mne) v Shirak (Arm) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Sarajevo (Bos) v Hibernians (Mlt) 5-2, 4-4 (agg 9-6)
Shkendija (Alb) v Portadown (NIr) 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
St Patrick's Athletic (RIr) v IBV (Ice)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, St Patrick's on away goals)
Suduva (Lit) v Daugava (Lat)
0-1, 3-2 (agg 3-3, Suduva on away goals)
Teuta (Alb) v Metalurgi Rustavi (Geo)
0-3, 1-6 (agg 1-9)
Tirana (Alb) v Grevenmacher (Lux) 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) v Aktobe (Kaz)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Trans Narva (Est) v Inter Baku (Aze)
0-5, 0-2 (agg 0-7)
Twente Enschede (Hol) v UE Santa Coloma (And)
6-0, 3-0 (agg 9-0)
Vikingur (Far) v Gomel (Bls) 0-6, 0-4 (agg 0-10)

BELARUS

BELARUS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE	17	12	2	3	25	9	38
Shakhtyor	18	10	5	3	34	12	35
Gomel	15	9	4	2	19	7	31
Dinamo	17	8	5	4	19	12	29
Minsk	18	7	3	8	22	28	24
Torpedo	17	4	6	7	7	12	18
Neman	17	3	9	5	24	21	18
Naftan	17	4	5	8	13	19	17
Belshina	17	4	4	9	11	21	16
Brest	17	4	3	10	12	20	15
Slavia	16	4	2	10	11	36	14

Standings on July 17

30-round season (10x3); bottom team will enter rel/prom play-off

BELGIUM

Fixtures: opening round

July 28
Beerschot v Lokeren
Club Brugge v Waasland-Beveren
Kortrijk v Anderlecht
Mechelen v Charleroi
Mons v OH Leuven
July 29
Genk v Cercle Brugge
Gent v Lierse
Standard v Zulte Waregem

BULGARIA

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 11/12
Beroe v Botev Vratsa
Botev Plovdiv v Slavia
Cherno More v Ludogorets
Levski v Chernomorets
Lokomotiv Sofia v Lokomotiv Plovdiv
Lovech v CSKA
Montana v Etar
Pirin v Minyor

CYPRUS

Fixtures: opening round

Sep 1/2
Alki v AEK
Anorthosis v AEP
Apollon v Ethnikos
Doxa v AEL
ENP v APOEL
Olympiakos v Nea Salamina
Omonia v Ayia Napa

CZECH REPUBLIC

Fixtures: opening round

July 27
Jablonec v Ostrava
July 28
Ceske Budejovice v Olomouc
Dukla v Sparta
Pribram v Liberec
Slovacko v Brno
July 29
Plzen v Hradec Kralove
Teplice v Mlada Boleslav
July 30
Slavia v Jihlava

DENMARK

July 13: AGF 1 AaB 1.
July 14: SonderjyskE 6 Randers 1.
July 15: Esbjerg 2 Silkeborg 3; Brondby 0 OB 1; Copenhagen 4 Midtjylland 2.
July 16: Horsens 0 Nordsjaelland 4.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SonderjyskE	1	1	0	0	6	1	3
Nordsjaelland	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Copenhagen	1	1	0	0	4	2	3
Silkeborg	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
OB	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
AaB	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
AGF	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Esbjerg	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Brondby	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Midtjylland	1	0	0	1	2	4	0
Horsens	1	0	0	1	0	4	0
Randers	1	0	0	1	1	6	0

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 18
Arsenal v Sunderland
Fulham v Norwich
Newcastle v Tottenham
Queens Park Rangers v Swansea
Reading v Stoke
West Bromwich v Liverpool
West Ham v Aston Villa
Aug 19
Manchester City v Southampton
Wigan v Chelsea
Aug 20
Everton v Manchester United

FINLAND

FINLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	17	10	2	5	33	21	32
HJK	17	9	3	5	27	15	30
Mariehamn	17	8	5	4	22	18	29
TPS	16	8	2	6	23	16	26
MyPa	17	7	4	6	18	14	25
VPS	17	7	4	6	18	14	25
Lahti	18	8	1	9	21	27	25
Honka	17	7	3	7	18	22	24
Haka	17	7	0	10	20	24	21
JJK	17	6	2	9	25	34	20
KuPS	17	4	4	9	19	25	16
Jaro	17	4	4	9	13	27	16

Standings on July 17

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

FRANCE

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 10
Montpellier v Toulouse
Aug 11
Evian TG v Bordeaux
Nancy v Brest
Nice v Ajaccio
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Rennes v Lyon
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Sochaux v Bastia
Troyes v Valenciennes
Aug 12
Reims v Marseille

GERMANY

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 24
Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen
Aug 25
Augsburg v Fortuna Dusseldorf
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
Freiburg v Mainz
Greuther Furth v Bayern Munich
Hamburg v Nuremberg
Monchengladbach v Hoffenheim
Aug 26
Hannover v Schalke
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg

HOLLAND

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 10
Willem II v NAC
Aug 11
Heracles v VVV
RKC v PSV
Roda JC v Zwolle
Aug 12
Ajax v AZ
Heerenveen v NEC
Twente v Groningen
Utrecht v Feyenoord
Vitesse v Den Haag

NORWAY

June 29: Sogndal 1 Fredrikstad 3.
June 30: Brann 2 Stabaek 1; Molde 3 Odd Grenland 1; Stromsgodset 4 Honefoss 0; Lillestrom 1 Sandnes Ulf 3; Haugesund 1 Tromso 1; Viking 1 Rosenborg 4.
July 2: Valerenga 0 Aalesund 0.
July 7: Honefoss 2 Brann 1; Tromso 1 Sogndal 1.
July 8: Sandnes Ulf 0 Valerenga 2; Aalesund 1 Viking 1; Stabaek 1 Stromsgodset 2; Odd Grenland 2 Haugesund 1; Rosenborg 1 Molde 0.
July 9: Fredrikstad 3 Lillestrom 4.
July 11: Odd Grenland 2 Valerenga 3.
July 13: Lillestrom 4 Tromso 2.
July 14: Valerenga 1 Molde 2.
July 15: Brann 6 Odd Grenland 2; Aalesund 3 Fredrikstad 0; Viking 2 Honefoss 1; Sogndal 3 Stabaek 1; Haugesund 0 Rosenborg 1.
July 16: Stromsgodset 2 Sandnes Ulf 1.

NORWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Stromsgodset	15	11	2	2	32	18	35
Molde	15	10	1	4	28	16	31
Rosenborg	15	7	7	1	25	13	28
Haugesund	15	6	6	3	23	15	24
Tromso	15	6	5	4	25	19	23
Valerenga	15	6	3	6	19	20	21
Honefoss	15	5	6	4	14	16	21
Aalesund	15	4	8	3	20	17	20
Brann	15	6	1	8	28	24	19
Sogndal	15	4	6	5	17	20	18
Viking	15	5	3	7	13	23	18
Lillestrom	15	4	5	6	22	27	17
Sandnes Ulf	15	4	5	6	19	25	17
Odd Grenland	15	4	4	7	21	27	16
Fredrikstad	15	3	3	9	24	28	12
Stabaek	15	2	1	12	12	34	7

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

year it gets easier and easier for us," said Lucescu. "That's because the team has been progressing all these years and are a title-winning machine."

WALES

Druids debut

Cefn Druids, who were runners-up in the Welsh Cup last season, became the first Cymru Alliance club to play in Europe when they held MyPa of Finland to a 0-0 draw in the first leg of their Europa League first round tie.

BRAZIL

Scolari cup win

Luiz Felipe Scolari's Palmeiras beat Coritiba 3-1 on aggregate to win the Copa Brasil – their first major title since 1999 – and secure a place in next year's Libertadores Cup.

Goals from Jorge Valdivia – who was later sent-off and missed the return – and Thiago Heleno gave Palmeiras a 2-0 advantage from the first leg.

Scolari's side then held out for a 1-1 draw at a rain-sodden Couto Pereira stadium, Betinho cancelling out Ayrton's opener for the hosts.

At last...Palmeiras celebrate their first trophy success since 1999

POLAND

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 17
Pogon v Zaglebie
Piast v Gornik

Aug 18
Lech v Ruch
Jagiellonia v Podbeskidzie
Widzew v Slask

Aug 19
Legia v Korona
Wisla v GKS Belchatow

Aug 20
Lechia v GKS Katowice

PORTUGAL

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 18/19
Beira Mar v Academica
Benfica v Braga
Gil Vicente v Porto
Guimaraes v Sporting
Nacional v Setubal
Olhanense v Estoril
Pacos Ferreira v Moreirense
Rio Ave v Maritimo

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

June 29: Bohemians 4 Shamrock 0; Bray 0 Cork 3; Derry 0 Drogheda 3; Dundalk 1 Sligo 2; St Patrick's 1 Shelbourne 0.
July 6: UCD 0 Derry 1; Shelbourne 4 Dundalk 0.
July 7: Sligo 1 Bray 1.
July 8: Shamrock 1 St Patrick's 1; Cork 1 Bohemians 1.
July 13: Derry 1 Sligo 2; Bray 2 Shelbourne 3; Dundalk 1 Shamrock 1.
July 15: Bohemians 1 UCD 0; St Patrick's 0 Drogheda 2.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sligo	16	10	5	1	26	10	35
Drogheda	16	8	5	3	28	18	29
St Patrick's	16	7	7	2	22	12	28
Shamrock	16	6	7	3	30	25	25
Shelbourne	17	7	3	7	22	23	24
Bohemians	17	6	4	7	17	16	22
Derry	17	6	4	7	19	20	22
Cork	16	4	7	5	21	20	19
Bray	17	4	4	9	26	36	16
Dundalk	16	3	4	9	12	31	13
UCD	16	2	4	10	14	26	10

30-round season (10x3); bottom team will enter rel/prom play-off
**Monaghan withdrew from league after 14 games; results expunged*

SCOTLAND

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 4
Celtic v Aberdeen
Hearts v St Johnstone
Kilmarnock v Dundee
Ross County v Motherwell
St Mirren v Inverness

Aug 5
Dundee United v Hibernian

SLOVAKIA

July 13: Zilina 4 Myjava 1.
July 14: Trnava 0 Kosice 0; Slovan 2 Tatran 1; Trencin 5 Nitra 0; Ruzomberok 3 Zlate Moravce 1.
July 15: Senica 2 Dukla 3.

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Trencin	1	1	0	0	5	0	3
Zilina	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Ruzomberok	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Dukla	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Slovan	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Kosice	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Trnava	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Senica	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Tatran	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Zlate Moravce	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Myjava	1	0	0	1	1	4	0
Nitra	1	0	0	1	0	5	0

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

SPAIN

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 18/19
Athletic Bilbao v Betis
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Celta Vigo v Malaga
Deportivo La Coruna v Osasuna
Levante v Atletico Madrid
Mallorca v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Granada
Real Madrid v Valencia
Sevilla v Getafe
Zaragoza v Valladolid

SWEDEN

June 30: Hacken 1 Sundsvall 2; Kalmar 3 Syrianska 0; Atvidaberg 5 Elfsborg 1; Mjallby 0 Norrkoping 2.
July 2: Malmo 4 AIK 0; Helsingborg 4 Gefle 1.
July 3: Djurgarden 3 IFK Gothenburg 2.
July 5: GAIS 0 Orebro 1.
July 7: Sundsvall 3 Atvidaberg 3; Syrianska 1 Djurgarden 1.
July 8: Gefle 0 GAIS 0; AIK 3 Hacken 1; Elfsborg 0 Mjallby 0; Norrkoping 2 Kalmar 1.
July 9: Orebro 2 Malmo 1; IFK Gothenburg 1 Helsingborg 1.
July 14: IFK Gothenburg 1 Gefle 1; Atvidaberg 2 AIK 0; Mjallby 1 Sundsvall 0; Helsingborg 1 Syrianska 0.
July 15: Orebro 1 Hacken 2; Kalmar 2 Elfsborg 1.
July 16: Malmo 2 GAIS 0; Djurgarden 1 Norrkoping 1.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elfsborg	15	10	1	4	24	14	31
Malmo	15	8	4	3	27	18	28
Helsingborg	15	6	7	2	18	14	25
Atvidaberg	15	7	3	5	32	23	24
AIK	15	6	6	3	18	16	24
Norrkoping	15	7	3	5	23	28	24
Hacken	15	7	2	6	32	20	23
Mjallby	15	4	8	3	18	18	20
Kalmar	15	5	4	6	18	19	19
Djurgarden	15	3	9	3	20	20	18
IFK Goth'burg	15	3	8	4	20	20	17
Sundsvall	15	4	5	6	18	19	17
Syrianska	15	5	2	8	15	23	17
Gefle	15	2	7	6	9	22	13
GAIS	15	1	7	7	11	18	10
Orebro	15	2	4	9	14	25	10

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SWITZERLAND

July 13: Servette 0 Basle 1.
July 14: Thun 0 Lausanne 0.
July 15: Lucerne 1 Zurich 1; Grasshopper 0 Sion 2; St Gallen 1 Young Boys 1.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sion	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Basle	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Lucerne	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
St Gallen	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Young Boys	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Zurich	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Lausanne	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Thun	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Servette	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Grasshopper	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

TURKEY

Fixtures: opening round

Aug 18/19
Elazigspor v Fenerbahce
Eskisehirspor v Akhisar
Galatasaray v Kasimpasa
Gaziantepspor v Sivasspor
Genclerbirligi v Antalyaspor
Istanbul BB v Besiktas
Karabukspor v Trabzonspor
Kayserispor v Bursaspor
Mersin v Orduspor

UKRAINE

July 13: Volyn 1 Karpaty 1.
July 14: Zorya 2 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0; Dynamo 1 Metalurh Donetsk 0; Chornomorets 3 Hoverla 2; Metalist 2 Illichivets 0.
July 15: Vorskla 0 Kryvbas 1; Shakhtar 6 Arsenal 0; Dnipro 3 Tavriya 1.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	1	1	0	0	6	0	3
Dnipro	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Metalist	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Zorya	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Chornomorets	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Dynamo	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Kryvbas	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Karpaty	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Volyn	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Hoverla	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Metalurh D	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Vorskla	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Tavriya	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Illichivets	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Metalurh Z	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Arsenal	1	0	0	1	0	6	0

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Final

1st leg
June 27
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Roncaglia 73)
Corinthians (Bra) 1 (Romarinho 85)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 55,000. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Boca: Orion - Roncaglia, Schiavi, Caruzzo, Rodriguez, Ledesma (Rivero 82), Somoza, Erviti, Riquelme, Mouche (Cvitanich 87), Silva (Viatri 85).
Corinthians: Cassio - Alessandro, Chicao, Leandro Castan, Fabio Santos, Ralf, Paulinho, Danilo (Romarinho 83), Alex (Wallace 90+2), Jorge Henrique (Liedson 39), Emerson Sheik.

2nd leg
July 4
Corinthians 2 (Emerson Sheik 54, 72)
Boca Juniors 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,186. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Corinthians 3-1 on agg
Corinthians: Cassio - Alessandro, Chicao, Leandro Castan, Fabio Santos, Ralf, Paulinho, Alex (Douglas 89), Danilo, Jorge Henrique (Wallace 90+2), Emerson Sheik (Liedson 90+1).
Boca: Orion (S Sosa 33) - F Sosa, Schiavi, Caruzzo, Rodriguez, Ledesma (Cvitanich 66), Somoza, Erviti, Riquelme, Mouche (Viatri 82), Silva.

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round draw

Danubio (Uru) v Olimpia (Par) (1)
Iquique (Chl) v Nacional (Uru) (2)
Blooming (Bol) v Universidad Catolica (Chl) (3)
Guarani (Par) v Oriente Petrolero (Bol) (4)
Liverpool (Uru) v Universitario (Bol) (5)
Aurora (Bol) v Cerro Largo (Uru) (6)
Tacuary (Par) v Cobreloa (Chl) (7)
O'Higgins (Chl) v Cerro Porteno (Par) (8)
Inti Gas (Per) v Millonarios (Col) (9)
Emelec (Ecu) v San Martin (Per) (10)
La Equidad (Col) v Mineros (Ven) (11)
Tachira (Ven) v Barcelona (Ecu) (12)
Tolima (Col) v Lara (Ven) (13)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) v Leon (Per) (14)
Union Comercio (Per) v Envigado (Col) (15)
Monagas (Ven) v LDU Loja (Ecu) (16)
Both legs to be played by Aug 22

2nd round draw

winner (1) v winner (10)
winner (3) v winner (13)
winner (4) v winner (9)
winner (7) v winner (12)
winner (11) v winner (8)
winner (14) v winner (6)
winner (15) v winner (5)
winner (16) v winner (2)
Bahia (Bra) v Sao Paulo (Bra)
Goianiense (Bra) v Figueirense (Bra)
Gremio (Bra) v Coritiba (Bra)
Palmeiras (Bra) v Botafogo (Bra)
Argentina 6th reps v Independiente (Arg)
Colon (Arg) v Racing Club (Arg)
Argentinos Juniors (Arg) v Tigre (Arg)
Both legs to be played by Sep 19

Bye to 3rd round:
Universidad de Chile (Chl; holders)

La U skipper....Jose Manuel Rojas

CHILE

La U are spot on

Universidad de Chile won the Primera apertura on penalties after drawing 3-3 on aggregate with O'Higgins in the play-off Final.

Guillermo Marino scored a 92nd-minute equaliser in the second leg to send the game to spot-kicks and deny opponents O'Higgins their first-ever national league championship.

The title success was *La U*'s third in a row and 16th overall.

COLOMBIA

Long wait is over

Santa Fe won their first league title in 37 years, beating Deportivo Pasto 2-1 on aggregate in the apertura play-off Final.

In what was likely to be Jonathan Copete's last game for the club before joining Argentinian side Velez Sarsfield, the 24-year-old scored the winning goal at the El Campin stadium after the two sides had drawn 1-1 in the first leg in Pasto.

ECUADOR

Libertadores return

Barcelona won the first stage of the Ecuadorian championship despite losing to Deportivo Cuenca 1-0 on the final day of the season.

Gustavo Costas' side finished level on points with LDU Loja – who could only draw 0-0 at home to Independiente – but finished top on goal difference and will play in next year's Libertadores Cup after an absence of eight years.

Barcelona also qualify

CLUB FOOTBALL

BRAZIL

June 30: Cruzeiro 2 Sao Paulo 3; Nautico 0 Fluminense 2; Vasco 3 Ponte Preta 2.
July 1: Portuguesa 0 Santos 0; Coritiba 2 Sport 3; Bahia 1 Internacional 1; Flamengo 3 Goianiense 2; Palmeiras 3 Figueirense 1; Gremio 0 Mineiro 1.
July 7: Botafogo 3 Bahia 0; Goianiense 0 Nautico 1; Internacional 2 Cruzeiro 1.
July 8: Fluminense 1 Flamengo 0; Santos 4 Gremio 2; Sao Paulo 3 Coritiba 1; Figueirense 1 Vasco 1; Mineiro 2 Portuguesa 0; Ponte Preta 1 Palmeiras 0; Sport 1 Corinthians 1.
July 11: Corinthians 1 Botafogo 3.
July 14: Corinthians 2 Nautico 1; Figueirense 3 Mineiro 4; Ponte Preta 4 Coritiba 1.
July 15: Botafogo 1 Fluminense 1; Internacional 0 Santos 0; Cruzeiro 1 Gremio 3; Bahia 1 Flamengo 2; Vasco 1 Goianiense 0; Palmeiras 1 Sao Paulo 1; Sport 2 Portuguesa 1.

BRAZIL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mineiro	9	7	1	1	16	6	22
Vasco	9	6	2	1	16	11	20
Fluminense	9	5	4	0	16	6	19
Botafogo	9	5	1	3	21	15	16
Sao Paulo	9	5	1	3	12	10	16
Internacional	9	4	4	1	12	7	16
Gremio	9	5	0	4	12	9	15
Ponte Preta	9	4	3	2	13	9	15
Flamengo	9	4	3	2	15	13	15
Cruzeiro	9	4	2	3	12	11	14
Sport	9	3	3	3	10	11	12
Nautico	9	3	1	5	10	17	10
Santos	9	1	6	2	7	7	9
Corinthians	9	2	2	5	7	12	8
Portuguesa	9	2	2	5	6	12	8
Figueirense	9	1	5	3	11	14	8
Coritiba	9	2	1	6	14	20	7
Bahia	9	1	4	4	7	12	7
Palmeiras	9	1	3	5	8	11	6
Goianiense	9	0	2	7	4	16	2

38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

CHILE

Apertura

CHILE – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile (Q)	17	13	1	3	44	14	40
O'Higgins (Q)	17	11	2	4	31	15	35
Iquique (Q)	17	10	5	2	30	14	35
U Catolica (Q)	17	8	6	3	31	17	30
Espanola (Q)	17	8	3	6	38	28	27
Colo Colo (Q)	17	7	5	5	22	21	26
La Calera (Q)	17	6	6	5	21	18	24
Cobreloa (Q)	17	7	2	8	23	25	23
Huachipato	17	6	5	6	25	28	23
U Concepcion	17	5	6	6	23	27	21
Wanderers	17	6	2	9	28	30	20
Audax Italiano	17	5	5	7	24	32	20
La Serena	17	5	4	8	24	33	19
Rangers	17	5	3	9	17	25	18
Palestino	17	5	3	9	14	26	18
Antofagasta	17	4	5	8	10	20	17
Cobresal	17	3	4	10	17	40	13
San Felipe	17	2	7	8	12	21	13

Top 8 entered championship quarter-finals; no relegation after apertura

Quarter-finals
1st legs - May 23-27; 2nd legs - May 26-June 11
Cobreloa v Univ Chile 0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
Colo Colo v Iquique 3-3, 2-1 (agg 5-4)
Espanola v Univ Catolica 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)
La Calera v O'Higgins 0-1, 2-3 (agg 2-4)

Semi-finals
1st legs - June 16/17; 2nd legs - June 23/24
Colo Colo v Univ Chile 2-0, 0-4 (agg 2-4)
Espanola v O'Higgins 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; O'Higgins through on better regular season record)

Final, 1st leg
June 28
O'Higgins 2 (Rojas 1, Lopez 72)
Univ Chile 1 (Marino 29)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Osorio

Final, 2nd leg
July 2
Univ Chile 2 (Aranguiz pen 66, Marino 90+2)
O'Higgins 1 (Fernandez pen 31)
No extra-time. **HT:** 0-1. **Att:** 44,198. **Ref:** Osses
Agg 3-3; Univ Chile 2-0 on pens
Sent off: Barroso (O'Higgins) 52min; Rojas (Univ Chile) 52min

COLOMBIA

Apertura

COLOMBIA – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tolima (Q)	18	10	6	2	28	16	36
Santa Fe (Q)	18	7	8	3	29	19	29
Itagui (Q)	18	8	5	5	25	18	29
Huila (Q)	18	8	5	5	23	17	29
Equidad (Q)	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Pasto (Q)	18	6	9	3	24	18	27
Chico (Q)	18	7	6	5	26	22	27
Cali (Q)	18	7	6	5	19	18	27
Patriotas	18	7	6	5	13	17	27
Junior	18	7	4	7	28	24	25
Envigado	18	5	8	5	23	24	23
Nacional	18	6	4	8	25	20	22
Millonarios	18	4	8	6	22	23	20
Cartagena	18	4	8	6	22	31	20
Quindio	18	3	9	6	20	29	18
Medellin	18	4	5	9	17	24	17
Once Caldas	18	2	8	8	22	26	14
Cucuta	18	3	2	13	12	35	11

Top 8 entered championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

COLOMBIA – C'SHIP PLAY-OFFS: GP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pasto (Q)[1]	6	3	2	1	7	6	11
Cali	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Tolima	6	3	1	2	6	5	10
Huila	6	0	1	5	2	8	1

[1]Pasto placed above Cali because of their better regular season record

COLOMBIA – C'SHIP PLAY-OFFS: GP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santa Fe (Q)	6	4	2	0	10	6	14
Equidad	6	2	2	2	10	9	8
Chico	6	2	1	3	6	8	7
Itagui	6	1	1	4	4	7	4

Group winners qualified for Final

Final, 1st leg
July 11
Pasto 1 (Rendon 26)
Santa Fe 1 (Quinonez 44)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Sanchez

Final, 2nd leg
July 15
Santa Fe 1 (Copete 71)
Pasto 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,000. **Ref:** Roldan
Santa Fe 2-1 on agg

ECUADOR

1st stage

1ST STAGE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona[1]	22	10	8	4	33	15	38
LDU Loja	22	10	8	4	25	18	38
Emelec	22	11	4	7	39	23	37
Independiente	22	10	7	5	29	20	37
Cuenca	22	11	3	8	24	26	36
LDU Quito	22	8	10	4	32	22	34
Dep Quito	22	8	7	7	34	23	31
El Nacional	22	8	5	9	24	34	29
Manta	22	7	6	9	22	23	27
Macara	22	5	6	11	19	33	21
Tecnico Univ	22	4	6	12	18	32	18
Olmedo	22	4	2	16	14	44	14

[1]Barcelona will meet winner of 2nd stage in the overall championship play-off; no relegation after 1st stage

PARAGUAY

Apertura

APERTURA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
C Porteno (C)	22	16	1	5	40	23	49
Olimpia	22	14	5	3	30	20	47
Libertad	22	13	5	4	40	19	44
Sol America	22	11	2	9	38	27	35
Nacional	22	10	3	9	40	32	33
Guarani	22	8	6	8	28	25	30
C Porteno PF	22	7	6	9	26	29	27
Luqueno	22	6	8	8	23	30	26
Independiente	22	6	7	9	28	42	25
Carapegua	22	4	8	10	23	29	20
Rubio Nu	22	5	3	14	24	40	18
Tacuary	22	1	8	13	15	39	11

No relegation after apertura

PERU

1st stage

PERU – 1ST STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cristal	23	13	5	5	47	23	44
Cesar Vallejo	23	13	4	6	35	22	43
Garcilaso	23	12	7	4	31	18	43
Melgar	23	10	5	8	31	25	35
Juan Aurich	23	10	4	9	29	31	34
Jose Galvez	23	9	7	7	24	31	34
Leon	23	8	8	7	31	25	32
Comercio	23	9	5	9	31	27	32
Inti Gas	23	9	5	9	22	22	32
Huancayo	23	8	5	10	26	32	29
Universitario[1]	23	7	7	9	29	32	27
Alianza[2]	23	8	7	8	24	28	27
San Martin	23	7	6	10	27	33	27
Cienciano	23	7	4	12	28	35	25
Sport Boys	23	5	8	10	20	29	23
Cobresal[3]	23	3	5	15	18	40	12

Standings on July 17
30-round stage (15x2); all teams will continue into the 2nd stage, in which they will be divided into 2 round-robin groups of 8 – the winner of each of those groups will meet to decide the champions; no relegation after 1st stage
[1]1pt deducted [2]4pts deducted [3]2pts deducted – all for failing to pay wages

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw

Group 1
Aguila (ESv)
Santos Laguna (Mex)
Toronto (Can)

Group 2
Herediano (CR)
Real Salt Lake (USA)
Tauro (Pan)

Group 3
FAS (ESv)
Houston Dynamo (USA)
Olimpia (Hnd)

Group 4
Caledonia AIA (T&T)
Marathon (Hnd)
Seattle Sounders (USA)

Group 5
Isidro Metapan (ESv)
Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
Puerto Rico Islanders (PR)

Group 6
Alajuelense (CR)
Real Esteli (Nic)
Tigres (Mex)

Group 7
Chorrillo (Pan)
Monterrey (Mex)
Municipal (Gtm)

Group 8
Guadalajara (Mex)
W Connection (T&T)
Xelaju (Gtm)

Matchdays:
July 31-Aug 2, Aug 21-23, Aug 28-30, Sep 18-20, Sep 25-27, Oct 23-25
Each team plays 4 times

Group winners qualify for quarter-finals

COSTA RICA

Clausura

Final, 1st leg
May 12
Herediano 4 (Cubero 46, Nunez 70, 86, Cancela 76)
Santos 2 (Rodriguez 24, Porras 50)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Quesada

Final, 2nd leg
May 19
Santos 1 (Lagos 35)
Herediano 2 (Cancela 43, Nunez 90)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vega
Herediano 6-3 on agg
Sent off: Rodriguez (Santos) 86min

CUBA

Championship play-offs

Final
1st leg - Apr 21; 2nd leg - Apr 28
Camaguey v Villa Clara 0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6)

Celebration...Santa Fe

for this year's Sudamericana Cup, along with LDU Loja, Emelec and Deportivo Quito, who won the second stage of last season's championship.

PARAGUAY

Derby drama

Cerro Porteno clinched the apertura championship when they beat arch-rivals Olimpia 2-1 on the final day of the campaign.

Cerro Porteno went into the Asuncion derby two points behind Olimpia and had Walter Lopez sent off after eight minutes. But when Olimpia's Renzo Revoredo was dismissed, numerical parity was restored and Cerro Porteno took a two-goal lead through Santiago Salcedo and Jonathan Fabbro.

Olimpia, who also had midfielder Eduardo Aranda sent off in the 68th minute for a second booking, replied through substitute Arnaldo Castorino to set up a dramatic final 15 minutes.

USA

Cosmos back in NASL

New York Cosmos will join the North American Soccer League, which is one level below MLS, in 2013.

Goals...Salcedo (left) and Fabbro

EL SALVADOR

Clausura

Final

May 6 - San Salvador (Cuscatlan)
Isidro Metapan 1 (R Sanchez 78)
Aguila 2 (O Romero 38, Munoz 70)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aguilar

GUATEMALA

Clausura

Final, 1st leg

May 16
Municipal 1 (Quintanilla 84)
Xelaju 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,662. **Ref:** Reyna
Sent off: Vides (Municipal) 81min

Final, 2nd leg

May 19
Xelaju 2 (Silva pen 7, Caal 78)
Municipal 1 (Leon 59)
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 2-1. **Att:** 11,014.
Ref: Polanco
*Agg 2-2; Xelaju 3-1 on pens**
Sent off: Penedo (Municipal) 4min
**Away goals not considered*

HONDURAS

Clausura

Final, 1st leg

May 12
Marathon 0
Olimpia 0

Final, 2nd leg

May 20
Olimpia 1 (Douglas Caetano 46)
Marathon 0
HT: 0-0
Olimpia 1-0 on agg

JAMAICA

Division split after 33-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

JAMAICA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portmore (C)	38	19	10	9	48	37	67
Boys' Town	38	18	12	8	44	34	66
Waterhouse	38	16	12	10	42	32	60
Humble Lions	38	15	12	11	41	33	57
Tivoli Gardens	38	14	14	10	42	33	56
Harbour View	38	12	17	9	35	31	53

JAMAICA – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montego Bay	38	14	12	12	48	34	54
Arnett Gardens	38	14	11	13	41	39	53
Sporting Cntrl	38	10	13	15	33	48	43
Highgate Utd	38	9	13	16	30	43	40
Village Utd (R)	38	7	11	20	28	45	32
Reno (R)	38	5	13	20	28	51	28

NICARAGUA

Clausura

Final

1st leg - May 13; 2nd leg - May 19
Diriangen v Real Esteli 0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)

PANAMA

Clausura

Final

May 22 - Panama City (Rommel Fernandez)
Chepo 1 (Bangueras pen 86)
Tauro 2 (Parrish 20, Renteria 79)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Moreno

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
W Con'ction (C)	21	13	1	7	32	20	40
T&TEC	21	11	6	4	36	19	39
Caledonia AIA	21	12	2	7	34	28	38
Defence Force	21	9	5	7	32	28	32
San Juan J (R)[1]	21	7	6	8	29	30	27
Police	21	5	6	10	30	47	21
NE Stars	21	5	5	11	21	27	20
St Ann's R'gers	21	4	5	12	24	39	17

[1]San Juan Jabloteh withdrew from league after end of season

UNITED STATES

Regular season

June 27: Montreal 0 Toronto 3.
June 29: Kansas City 0 Chicago 1.
June 30: Toronto 1 New York 1; DC United 3 Montreal 0; New England 2 Seattle 2; Houston 2 Philadelphia 1; Columbus 2 Salt Lake 0; Colorado 3 Portland 0; San Jose 4 Los Angeles 3.
July 3: Houston 0 Chicago 0; Portland 2 San Jose 1.
July 4: Montreal 1 Kansas City 3; Dallas 1 Toronto 1; Colorado 0 Vancouver 1; Salt Lake 0 Seattle 0; Los Angeles 1 Philadelphia 2.
July 7: Kansas City 0 Houston 0; Salt Lake 3 Portland 0; Dallas 0 San Jose 0; Chivas 0 Vancouver 0; Seattle 2 Colorado 1.
July 8: Chicago 0 Los Angeles 2; Philadelphia 3 Toronto 0; New England 2 New York 0; Montreal 2 Columbus 1.
July 11: Toronto 3 Vancouver 2.
July 14: Philadelphia 2 Montreal 1; New England 0 Toronto 1; Columbus 0 Kansas City 2; Chicago 1 Vancouver 0; Colorado 1 Dallas 2; San Jose 5 Salt Lake 0; Portland 3 Los Angeles 5.
July 15: New York 2 Seattle 2; Houston 4 DC United 0.

USA – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kansas City	19	11	3	5	25	17	36
DC United	19	10	3	6	34	26	33
New York	19	9	5	5	34	29	32
Chicago	19	9	4	6	22	21	31
Houston	19	7	7	5	26	24	28
New England	18	6	4	8	24	23	22
Columbus	17	6	4	7	17	19	22
Montreal	21	6	3	12	28	38	21
Philadelphia	17	6	2	9	20	19	20
Toronto	19	4	4	11	22	35	16

34-round regular season (7x3 & 2x2 in own conference, 9x1 in western conference)

USA – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Jose	20	12	4	4	41	24	40
Salt Lake	21	11	3	7	31	26	36
Seattle	20	8	7	5	25	21	31
Vancouver	20	8	6	6	21	23	30
Los Angeles	20	8	2	10	33	32	26
Colorado	19	7	1	11	26	26	22
Chivas	17	5	5	7	11	18	20
Dallas	20	4	7	9	19	28	19
Portland	18	5	4	9	19	29	19

34-round regular season (8x3 in own conference, 10x1 in eastern conference)

Top 5 in both conferences will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

July 7: ASO Chlef (Alg) 0 Etoile Sahel (Tun) 1.
July 8: Sunshine Stars (Nga) 0 Esperance (Tun) 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esperance	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Etoile Sahel	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
ASO Chlef	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sunshine Stars	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group B

July 7: Berekum Chelsea (Gha) 3 Zamalek (Egy) 2.
July 8: Al Ahly (Egy) 2 TP Mazembe (DRC) 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Berekum C'sea	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Al Ahly	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Zamalek	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
TP Mazembe	1	0	0	1	1	2	0

Remaining matchdays:
July 20-22, Aug 4/5, Aug 17-19, Aug 31-Sep 2, Sep 13-15

Top 2 in both groups qualify for semi-finals

CONFEDERATION CUP

Intermediate round

(losing teams from the Champions League 2nd round, marked *, entered at this stage)
1st legs - June 29-July 2; 2nd legs - July 12-15
Al Hilal* (Sud) v CO Bamako (Mli)
2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
Al Merreikh* (Sud) v Black Leopards (SAf)
3-2, 0-0 (agg 3-2)
Amadou Diallo* (IvC) v Wydad Casablanca (Mor)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Coton Sport* (Cam) v Al Ahli Shendi (Sud)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Djoliba* (Mli) v Club Africain (Tun)
2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2, Djoliba 4-3 on pens)
Dynamos* (Zim) v InterClube (Ang)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Maghreb Fes* (Mor) v AC Leopard (Con)
1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2)
Stade Malien* (Mli) v COD Meknes (Mor)
3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Ahli Shendi
Al Hilal
Al Merreikh
InterClube

Group B
AC Leopard
Djoliba
Stade Malien
Wydad Casablanca

Matchdays: *Aug 3-5, Aug 17-19, Aug 31-Sep 2, Sep 14-16, Oct 5-7, Oct 19-21*

ALGERIA

ALGERIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ES Setif (C)	30	16	5	9	53	40	53
JSM Bejaia	30	15	8	7	40	26	53
USM Alger	30	15	7	8	37	25	52
CR Belouizdad	30	13	9	8	34	28	48
ASO Chlef	30	14	5	11	41	34	47
MC Alger	30	11	11	8	35	33	44
CA Batna	30	12	8	10	38	25	44
WA Tlemcen	30	12	8	10	39	37	44
JS Kabylie	30	10	11	9	29	23	41
El Harrach	30	11	5	14	28	31	38
MC El Eulma	30	10	8	12	38	39	38
Constantine	30	8	12	10	35	42	36
MC Oran	30	9	8	13	38	51	35
AS Khroub (R)	30	7	10	13	23	46	31
Hussein Dey (R)	30	5	11	14	29	39	26
MC Saida (R)	30	6	6	18	28	46	24

BOTSWANA

BOTSWANA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
C'tre Chiefs (C)	30	25	3	2	95	30	78
Meat Com'sion	30	17	7	6	35	21	58
T'ship Rollers	30	16	9	5	57	24	57
Gaborone	30	17	6	7	60	33	57
Nico	30	16	4	10	57	41	52
Ecco City	30	13	9	8	51	37	48
Defence Force	30	13	7	10	41	37	46
Mogoditshane	30	12	4	14	37	60	40
Ext Gunners	30	10	8	12	40	44	38
Police XI	30	9	9	12	35	48	36
Miscellaneous	30	11	1	18	34	52	34
Tafic	30	9	6	15	40	53	33
UF Santos	30	8	4	18	31	55	28
Notwane (R)	30	8	2	20	35	51	26
GN Tigers (R)	30	5	9	16	23	50	24
Satmos (R)	30	5	4	21	37	72	19

GABON

GABON – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mounana (C)	26	17	6	3	40	20	57
US Bitam	26	14	8	4	30	19	50
Mangasport	26	13	8	5	40	22	47
AS Pelican	26	12	9	5	27	17	45
Missile	26	13	5	8	42	26	44
Sapins	26	12	4	10	34	24	40
US Oyem	26	10	8	8	31	26	38
Ombilianziami	26	10	5	11	28	26	35
Cercle Mberi	26	7	9	10	31	34	30
AS Solidarite	26	6	10	10	30	34	28
RC Masuku	26	6	6	14	33	57	24
Sogea	26	5	7	14	25	38	22
Stade Mandji (R)	26	4	8	14	23	42	20
FC 105 (R)	26	5	3	18	21	50	18

ETHIOPIA

St George triumph

St George regained the Premier League title, four points clear of Dedebit, with EEPCO in third place.

GHANA

Clottey on fire

Emmanuel Clottey made it nine goals in seven CAF Champions League games this season with a hat-trick in his side's 3-2 victory at home to Zamalek of Egypt.

MOROCCO

Holders see red

CAF Confederation Cup holders Maghreb Fes had four players sent off as they were knocked out of this year's tournament by AC Leopard of Congo.

Holding a 1-0 lead from the home leg of their third-round qualifier, the Moroccan side lost 2-0 in the return with Rachid Dahmani, Omar Ennamsaoui, Said Hammouni and Younes Lyousfi all dismissed.

SUDAN

Trio drawn together

For the first time ever, three teams from the same country have been drawn together in the CAF Confederation Cup group stage, with Sudanese trio Al Ahly Shendi, Al Hilal and Al Merreikh in Group A with InterClube of Angola.

While Omdurman-based clubs Hilal and Merreikh are perennial competitors in continental tournaments, Ahly are involved for the first time.

Dismissed...Hammouni

GAMBIA

GAMBIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Banjul (C)	22	11	6	5	27	14	39
Armed Forces	22	11	5	6	25	17	38
Ports Authority	22	8	10	4	24	14	34
Samger	22	7	10	5	17	16	31
Brikama Utd	22	7	8	7	23	20	29
Steve Biko	22	6	9	7	22	22	27
Gamtel	22	5	12	5	16	18	27
Young Africans	22	5	12	5	16	18	27
Bakau United	22	7	5	10	16	19	26
Hawks	22	5	9	8	15	22	24
Serrekunda (R)	22	4	11	7	16	22	23
Wallidan (R)	22	5	5	12	13	28	20

GHANA

GHANA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Asante K'ko (C)	30	18	9	3	43	18	63
Ashanti Gold	30	13	10	7	35	33	49
Hearts of Oak	30	12	11	7	31	20	47
Medeama	30	14	4	12	42	34	46
Edubiase	30	14	4	12	36	36	46
Aduana Stars	30	11	12	7	26	17	45
Berekum C	30	11	12	7	30	23	45
Liberty	30	11	9	10	39	30	42
Wa All Stars	30	11	9	10	20	20	42
Ebusua Dwarfs	30	9	9	12	23	26	36
Tema Youth	30	9	8	13	32	33	35
Heart of Lions	30	7	12	11	22	31	33
Berekum A	30	7	9	14	24	40	30
Wassaman (R)	30	7	8	15	27	43	29
Bechem (R)	30	6	11	13	25	42	29
Mighty Jets (R)	30	5	13	12	23	32	28

LESOTHO

LESOTHO – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LCS (C)	22	13	5	4	39	18	44
Defence Force	22	10	8	4	26	17	38
Bantu	22	8	11	3	25	16	35
Matlama	22	10	4	8	27	27	34
Lioli	22	7	9	6	18	15	30
LMPS	22	7	9	6	21	25	30
Mpharane C	22	6	9	7	26	30	27
Linare	22	7	5	10	22	30	26
Joy	22	5	9	8	20	23	24
Likhopo	22	5	9	8	14	17	24
Maduma (R)	22	4	8	10	27	35	20
Majantja (R)	22	2	10	10	11	23	16

MAURITIUS

MAURITIUS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pamplem'es (C)	18	12	2	4	41	20	38
ASPL 2000	18	11	2	5	30	17	35
Cercle	18	10	4	4	32	19	34
P Riviere Noire	18	10	4	4	31	19	34
ASRR	18	8	3	7	29	23	27
ASVP	18	6	6	6	15	18	24
Savanne	18	7	2	9	24	34	23
C'pe Starlight	18	7	1	10	27	30	22
PAS Mates (R)	18	2	3	13	11	31	9
Entente BR (R)	18	2	3	13	20	49	9

NAMIBIA

NAMIBIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Black Africa (C)	22	17	4	1	42	12	55
Civics	22	11	5	6	30	17	38
African Stars	22	10	5	7	26	17	35
Blue Waters	22	8	10	4	27	21	34
SK Windhoek	22	8	9	5	19	14	33
Tigers	22	7	11	4	23	21	32
Ramblers	22	8	5	9	24	24	29
Mighty Gunners	22	7	6	9	27	30	27
Orlando P'tes	22	6	6	10	26	26	24
Eleven Arrows	22	5	5	12	18	31	20
United Stars (R)	22	4	5	13	15	36	17
Hotspurs (R)	22	3	5	14	23	51	14

SWAZILAND

SWAZILAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mbabane S (C)	22	15	2	5	46	27	47
Royal L'pards	22	14	3	5	48	19	45
Manzini Sun's	22	13	2	7	34	22	41
Highlanders	22	12	4	6	29	21	40
Manzini W'rs	22	11	5	6	33	20	38
Malanti Ch'fs	22	10	6	6	47	35	36
Moneni P'tes	22	11	2	9	22	19	35
Green Mamba	22	10	4	8	29	27	34
Y'ng Buffaloes	22	4	9	9	22	33	21
Red Lions	22	3	5	14	24	51	14
Tambankulu (R)	22	3	3	16	14	44	12
Hellenic (R)	22	1	5	16	15	45	8

TANZANIA

TANZANIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Simba (C)	26	19	5	2	47	12	62
Azam	26	17	5	4	40	15	56
Young Africans	26	15	4	7	41	30	49
Mtibwa Sugar	26	12	6	8	34	25	42
Coastal Union	26	12	3	11	27	28	39
JKT Oljoro	26	9	8	9	20	25	35
Kagera Sugar	26	7	11	8	26	27	32
JKT Ruvu	26	7	11	8	27	34	32
Shooting Stars	26	7	10	9	24	24	31
African Lyon	26	6	9	11	23	30	27
Toto Africans	26	5	11	10	24	31	26
Villa Squad (R)	26	7	5	14	29	46	26
Moro Utd (R)	26	3	10	13	28	46	19
Polisi D'ma (R)	26	3	8	15	21	38	17

UGANDA

UGANDA – FINAL[1]

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Express (C)	28	15	9	4	39	21	54
Bunamwaya	28	15	8	5	46	18	53
URA	28	14	9	5	40	23	51
Simba	28	13	7	8	26	21	46
SC Villa	28	12	9	7	25	20	45
Proline	28	11	11	6	30	16	44
KCC	28	12	8	8	32	22	44
Masaka	28	11	5	12	21	24	38
Water	28	7	13	8	18	27	34
Maroons	28	8	9	11	25	25	33
Victors	28	7	12	9	21	22	33
Police	28	6	13	9	23	30	31
Bidco	28	7	10	11	21	31	31
Hoima-Busia (R)	28	5	5	18	22	48	20
Utoda (R)	28	0	6	22	16	57	6

[1]Fire Masters expelled from league for failing to appear for 3 successive games; results expunged

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Adelaide United (Aus) v Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Al Ittihad (Sau) v Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Sepahan (Irn) v Al Ahli (Sau)
Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) v Al Hilal (Sau)
1st legs - Sep 19; 2nd legs - Oct 2/3

AFC CUP

Quarter-finals draw

Arbil (Irq) v Kelantan (Mly)
Arema (Ins) v Al Ettifaq (Sau)
Chonburi (Tha) v Al Shorta (Syr)
Kuwait SC (Kuw) v Al Wehdat (Jor)
1st legs - Sep 18; 2nd legs - Sep 25/26

BAHRAIN

BAHRAIN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Riffa (C)	18	14	3	1	34	16	45
Muharraq	18	12	2	4	41	13	38
Busaiteen	18	10	4	4	34	28	34
Al Hadd	18	5	7	6	23	26	22
Al Hala	18	6	3	9	29	33	21
Bahrain SC	18	6	3	9	25	29	21
Al Najma	18	6	2	10	24	26	20
Manama	18	6	2	10	20	29	20
Al Ahli (R)[1]	18	5	3	10	15	28	18
East Riffa (R)	18	4	3	11	19	36	15

[1]Al Ahli relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

CHINA

CHINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guangzhou E	17	11	3	3	32	15	36
Jiangsu	17	9	5	3	29	17	32
Beijing	17	8	4	5	20	18	28
Guizhou	17	7	6	4	27	17	27
Guangzhou RF	17	9	0	8	26	24	27
Changchun	17	7	4	6	19	25	25
Dalian Shide	17	5	7	5	23	25	22
Liaoning	17	4	9	4	20	20	21
Shandong	16	5	5	6	21	19	20
Tianjin	17	5	5	7	16	18	20
Hangzhou	17	5	5	7	15	24	20
Shanghai S'ua	17	4	7	6	16	18	19
Shanghai S'xin	17	4	6	7	18	16	18
Dalian Aerbin	17	3	8	6	25	28	17
Qingdao	17	4	5	8	10	16	17
Henan	16	4	3	9	12	29	15

Standings on July 17
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

HONG KONG

HONG KONG – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kitchee (C)	18	13	3	2	44	20	42
Pegasus	18	12	2	4	48	26	38
South China	18	10	6	2	47	17	36
Sun Hei	18	8	4	6	29	22	28
Citizen	18	5	8	5	29	31	23
Tuen Mun	18	5	8	5	26	22	23
Rangers	18	6	4	8	32	38	22
Wofoo Tai Po	18	6	2	10	24	40	20
HK Sapling (R)	18	2	4	12	17	53	10
Sham SP (R)	18	1	3	14	9	36	6

INDIA

INDIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dempo (C)	26	18	3	5	59	21	57
East Bengal	26	15	6	5	46	22	51
Churchill Bros	26	14	6	6	47	28	48
Mohun Bagan	26	13	8	5	51	32	47
Pune	26	13	7	6	44	34	46
Salgaocar	26	12	8	6	32	19	44
Prayag Utd	26	11	9	6	41	32	42
Sporting Goa	26	11	7	8	53	43	40
Air India	26	9	5	12	30	37	32
Shillong Lajong	26	7	7	12	24	44	28
Mumbai	26	7	3	16	31	52	24
Chirag Utd (R)	26	6	2	18	28	50	20
Pailan Arrows[1]	26	2	10	14	17	40	16
H'stan Aero (R)	26	1	5	20	19	68	8

[1]Pailan Arrows reprieved from relegation because they are a development team

JAPAN

June 27: Gamba 2 Nagoya 2; Tokyo 0 Kashiwa 1.
June 30: Yokohama 1 Nagoya 1; Vegalta 2 Sanfrecce 2; Omiya 1 Shimizu 0; Kawasaki 0 Vissel 1; Albirex 1 Kashima 1; Jubilo 3 Tokyo 1; Gamba 2 Kashiwa 6; Cerezo 1 Urawa 1; Sagan 1 Consadole 0.
July 7: Consadole 0 Albirex 1; Urawa 4 Sagan 3; Shimizu 0 Kawasaki 0; Kashima 1 Omiya 0; Tokyo 3 Gamba 2; Kashiwa 1 Nagoya 2; Yokohama 1 Cerezo 1; Vissel 0 Vegalta 1; Sanfrecce 2 Jubilo 0.
July 14: Shimizu 3 Kashiwa 5; Omiya 2 Vissel 2; Albirex 0 Urawa 0; Jubilo 4 Consadole 1; Nagoya 0 Vegalta 0; Gamba 1 Yokohama 2; Cerezo 0 Kashima 1; Sanfrecce 3 Kawasaki 0; Sagan 1 Tokyo 0.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sanfrecce	18	11	3	4	37	18	36
Vegalta	18	10	6	2	34	15	36
Urawa	18	8	7	3	24	18	31
Jubilo	18	9	3	6	38	26	30
Kashiwa	18	9	3	6	37	29	30
Nagoya	18	8	5	5	25	23	29
Tokyo	18	9	1	8	21	21	28
Sagan	18	7	6	5	21	17	27
Yokohama	18	6	9	3	19	15	27
Kawasaki	18	8	3	7	22	25	27
Kashima	18	7	4	7	26	22	25
Shimizu	18	7	4	7	19	19	25
Vissel	18	8	1	9	24	26	25
Omiya	18	5	5	8	16	29	20
Cerezo	18	5	4	9	19	24	19
Albirex	18	4	5	9	10	21	17
Gamba	18	3	4	11	27	40	13
Consadole	18	1	1	16	11	42	4

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

JORDAN

JORDAN – FINAL[1]

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Faisaly[1]	22	16	3	3	50	17	51
Al Ramtha[1]	22	15	6	1	45	15	51
Al Wehdat	22	11	7	4	34	18	40
Al Buqa'a	22	10	6	6	30	26	36
S Al Ordon	22	7	7	8	26	25	28
Al Arabi	22	7	7	8	28	32	28
Al Jazeera	22	7	6	9	26	31	27
That Ras	22	5	9	8	31	36	24
Mansheyat	22	6	6	10	30	36	24
Al Yarmouk	22	5	6	11	19	35	21
Al Jalil	22	3	8	11	22	40	17
Kfarsoum (R)	22	4	1	17	26	56	13

[1]Championship play-off required as top 2 finished level on points

MALAYSIA

Title defence

Kelantan became only the third team to successfully defend their Malaysian title – after Kedah and Selangor – when they beat Perak 6-0 with goals from Indra Putra Mahayuddin (three), Badri Radzi, Mohammed Ghaddar and Nurul Azwan.

Their 24-match unbeaten run came to an end in their next game, however, as they lost 1-0 away to Felda United.

Victorious...Ghaddar

SOUTH KOREA

Double century

Gyeongnam goalkeeper Kim Byung-Ji, the oldest player in the K-League at 42, extended his league record for clean sheets to 200 in his side's 3-0 win at Gangwon.

Record breaker...Kim

Championship play-off
May 6: Al Ramtha 0 Al Faisaly 3.

KUWAIT

KUWAIT – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qadsia (C)	21	16	3	2	40	10	51
Kuwait SC	21	11	7	3	29	19	40
Al Arabi	21	9	6	6	27	20	33
Al Salmiya	21	7	4	10	26	34	25
Al Jahra	21	4	12	5	25	30	24
Kazma	21	5	7	9	31	38	22
Al Naser[1]	21	4	5	12	23	35	17
Al Shabab (R)	21	2	8	11	20	35	14

[1]Al Naser won rel/prom play-off to stay up

LEBANON

LEBANON – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Safa (C)	22	17	4	1	50	16	55
Al Nejmeh	22	16	3	3	37	16	51
Al Ahed	22	14	6	2	42	17	48
Al Ansar	22	12	5	5	35	24	41
Al Akhaa AA	22	8	4	10	28	32	28
S Al Sahel	22	7	6	9	25	26	27
Tripoli	22	5	9	8	26	26	24
Racing	22	5	8	9	18	25	23
Salam Sour	22	5	6	11	28	38	21
Tadamon	22	3	11	8	15	26	20
Al Mabarrah (R)	22	3	4	15	21	44	13
Al Ahli (R)	22	2	4	16	18	53	10

OMAN

OMAN – FINAL[1]	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fanja[1]	22	12	7	3	31	19	43
Al Shabab[1]	22	13	4	5	28	19	43
Al Oruba	22	10	10	2	28	16	40
Al Taleea	22	9	5	8	23	22	32
Dhofar	22	8	7	7	19	18	31
Oman	22	9	3	10	24	25	30
Al Suwaiq	22	7	7	8	30	22	28
Sur	22	7	7	8	20	23	28
Al Nahda	22	8	3	11	27	33	27
Salalah (R)[2]	22	6	7	9	22	35	25
Al Msnaa (R)	22	6	4	12	35	39	22
Al Ahli/S'ab (R)	22	3	4	15	24	40	13

[1]Championship play-off required as top 2 finished level on points
[2]Salalah relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

Championship play-off
May 21: Fanja 3 Al Shabab 3 (aet, Fanja 7-6 on pens).

PHILIPPINES

PHILIPPINES – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Global (C)	18	13	3	2	49	17	42
Kaya	18	13	3	2	30	17	42
Loyola	18	11	4	3	64	27	37
Stallion	18	8	5	5	37	20	29
Air Force	18	7	4	7	31	35	25
Pasargad	18	7	3	8	30	31	24
Nomads	18	4	7	7	25	36	19
Green Archers	18	3	5	10	30	34	14
Army	18	3	4	11	23	48	13
Navy (R)	18	1	2	15	15	69	5

QATAR

QATAR – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lekhwiya (C)	22	12	7	3	36	16	43
El Jaish	22	12	5	5	48	24	41
Al Rayyan	22	10	9	3	49	26	39
Al Sadd	22	10	6	6	35	24	36
Al Khor	22	9	5	8	30	29	32
Al Gharafa	22	8	7	7	26	27	31
Al Wakrah	22	8	4	10	30	37	28
Al Kharaitiyat	22	5	10	7	24	35	25
Al Arabi	22	4	12	6	19	28	24
Qatar SC	22	6	6	10	32	46	24
Umm Salal[1]	22	4	8	10	20	32	20
Al Ahli (R)	22	3	3	16	24	49	12

[1]Umm Salal won rel/prom play-off to stay up

SOUTH KOREA

SOUTH KOREA – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk	21	14	4	3	48	20	46
Seoul	21	12	6	3	30	18	42
Suwon	21	12	3	6	33	26	39
Ulsan	21	11	5	5	31	21	38
Jeju	21	10	6	5	40	27	36
Busan	21	9	6	6	24	21	33
Pohang	21	9	4	8	24	20	31
Daegu	21	8	7	6	26	27	31
Gyeongnam	22	8	3	11	27	29	27
Seongnam	22	7	5	10	20	27	26
Chunnam	21	5	7	9	19	29	22
Incheon	21	4	9	8	16	23	21
Gangwon	21	6	2	13	22	35	20
Gwangju	21	4	7	10	30	38	19
Sangju	21	5	3	13	20	32	18
Daejeon	21	5	3	13	18	35	18

Standings on July 17
30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ain (C)	22	17	4	1	52	16	55
Al Nasr	22	11	8	3	49	33	41
Al Shabab	22	10	8	4	39	27	38
Al Jazira	22	11	2	9	47	38	35
Al Ahli	22	10	4	8	45	42	34
Al Wahda	22	8	9	5	32	30	33
Ajman	22	9	4	9	36	35	31
Al Wasl	22	7	5	10	32	40	26
Bani Yas	22	6	6	10	34	39	24
Dubai	22	5	5	12	29	40	20
Emirates (R)	22	5	2	15	28	56	17
Sharjah (R)	22	2	5	15	26	53	11

OCEANIA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

SOLOMON ISLANDS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Warriors (C)	14	11	1	2	41	11	34
Western Utd	14	10	1	3	33	22	31
Koloale	14	8	3	3	54	20	27
Kakamora	14	7	0	7	22	29	21
Malaita Kingz	14	4	3	7	19	23	15
Kossa	14	4	2	8	29	41	14
Hana	14	3	2	9	22	44	11
Marist Fire	14	1	4	9	16	46	7

TAHITI

Division split after 10-round regular season

TAHITI – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Dragon[2] (C)	14	11	3	0	42	9	52
Tamarii Faa'a	14	9	2	3	25	20	43
Manu Ura	14	8	3	3	29	15	41
Tefana	14	6	6	2	24	13	38
Pirae	14	3	3	8	21	35	26
Central	14	3	3	8	27	36	26
Tapuhute	14	3	2	9	23	39	25
Roniu	14	1	2	11	10	34	19

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]Dragon awarded 2 bonus pts for topping regular season table

VANUATU

VANUATU – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Amicale (C)	14	12	1	1	50	4	37
Tafea	14	11	0	3	35	8	33
Shepherds Utd	14	7	2	5	25	24	23
Tupuji Imere	14	5	3	6	14	27	18
Seveners Utd	14	4	4	6	15	24	16
Spirit 08	14	4	3	7	18	20	15
Ifira Black Bird	14	3	1	10	13	40	10
Teouma Ac'my	14	2	2	10	13	36	8

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (Q) = qualified (R) = relegated

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

August 1
UEFA Champions League 3rd qual rd, 1st leg
August 1 and 2
CONCACAF Champions League group games
August 2
Europa League 3rd qualifying round 1st leg
August 3,4 and 5
CAF Champions League group games
August 7 and 8
UEFA Champions League 3rd qual rd, 2nd leg
August 9
Europa League 3rd qualifying round 2nd leg
August 11
Olympic Final
August 14 and 15
International friendlies
August 17, 18 and 19
CAF Champions League group games
August 21 and 22
UEFA Champions League play-off round, 1st leg
August 21, 22 and 23
CONCACAF Champions League group games
August 23
Europa League play-off round, 1st leg
August 28 and 29
UEFA Champions League play-off round, 2nd leg
August 28, 29 and 30
CONCACAF Champions League group games
August 30
Europa League play-off round, second leg
August 31
CAF Champions League group games; UEFA Super Cup

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THE GREAT TEAMS

Ajax 1995

A team dominated by home-grown youngsters overcame Milan to claim the European Cup

Dutch treat...Ajax celebrate their 1995 European Cup Final victory

Ajax's 1995 European Cup Final triumph, featuring a team of mostly local talent, would not be possible today.

A side containing the De Boer twins and youngsters such as Clarence Seedorf, Edgar Davids, Michael Reiziger and Edwin Van der Sar beat Milan 1-0 in the Final in Vienna. The winning goal was scored by 18-year-old substitute Patrick Kluivert, who had been introduced by Louis Van Gaal, the coach with the confidence – his critics would say arrogance – to promote youth ahead of experience.

There were old heads in the side too, notably Frank Rijkaard, who had returned to Amsterdam after success in Italy with Milan. But Van Gaal's Ajax played with youthful exuberance.

UEFA Cup winners in 1992 and Dutch champions in 1994, Ajax added another league title and the Club World Cup to their Viennese triumph.

But within a year it had all begun to fall apart. They lost the 1996 Champions League Final on penalties to Juventus and their brightest stars drifted away. Reiziger and Davids joined Milan on free transfers, made possible by the Bosman ruling, Kluivert followed a year later, and in 1997 Van Gaal left for Barcelona, where he was joined by the De Boer twins.

In the summer of 1996, Ajax quit the homely De Meer stadium for the futuristic Amsterdam Arena, but in moving out to the suburbs the club lost part of its identity. It has been struggling to recover ever since. WS

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Louis Van Gaal
Former youth-team coach who was promoted to the top job at Ajax when Leo Beenhakker left for Real Madrid in 1991. A clever tactician but also a strict disciplinarian, he left for Barcelona in 1997, winning La Liga in his first season. His time in charge of Holland's national side ended with a poor showing at the 2002 World Cup, but his reputation was revived with more league success at Ajax, before leading Bayern Munich to the 2010 Champions League Final.

Disciplinarian...Van Gaal

Tactics
Ajax played a traditional 3-4-3 or 4-3-3 system under Van Gaal, with Rijkaard oscillating between central midfield and the defence. George and Overmars offered pace and penetration on the wings, while Litmanen was the elusive, deep-lying forward.

In the Final against Milan, teenager Kluivert replaced Litmanen in the second half, with Ronald De Boer switching to the right wing. Nigerian attacker Kanu also made a late appearance, replacing Seedorf as Ajax went in search of their late winner.

THE STARTING XI

Edwin Van der Sar
Goalkeeper
Youth product who spent nine seasons in Amsterdam before joining Juventus in 1999.

Michael Reiziger
Defender
Right-back who made his Ajax debut as a 17-year-old. Joined Milan in 1996.

Danny Blind
Defender
Captain, centre-back and experienced hand who played 13 seasons for Ajax.

Frank De Boer
Defender
Ajax trainee who began at left-back before switching to the centre. The current Ajax coach.

Frank Rijkaard
Midfielder
Versatile European Cup-winner with Milan who returned to end his career in Amsterdam.

Clarence Seedorf
Midfielder
Made his Ajax debut aged 16 in 1992 before leaving in 1995 for Sampdoria.

Finidi George
Winger
Nigeria international who would go on to play in Spain for Betis and Mallorca.

Edgar Davids
Midfielder
Nicknamed "the pit bull" for his tenacious style of play. Moved to Milan in 1996.

Ronald De Boer
Forward
Versatile attacker who followed Van Gaal to Barcelona. Twin brother of Frank.

Jari Litmanen
Forward
Finland international who succeeded Dennis Bergkamp in the No10 shirt and role at Ajax.

Marc Overmars
Winger
Speedy with a powerful shot, he joined Ajax from Willem II in 1992.

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